ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR COLUMBIA COUNTY 2027

Purpose Statement

The mission of the Port of Columbia is to maximize public resources and private investment to **create jobs, provide infrastructure, and maintain and improve the economic vitality of Columbia County and its communities.** The Port also contracts with the State of Washington to provide county-wide economic development coordination. This economic development plan outlines the methods we use in pursuit of the mission.

Core Elements of Work

1. **Create Jobs**

   Business Retention and Expansion

   - Meet annually and as needed with business owners to express appreciation for their business and help identify their future needs and opportunities.
   - Host events and trainings that support business retention and education.
   - Continue work on the growth of the value-added ag and local food processing sector.
   - Work with community partners to increase tourism and recreation opportunities in support of related businesses.
   - Work with renewable energy industries, such as wind, solar, and renewable fuels on locating and expanding in Columbia County
   - Continue to hold virtual monthly Economic Development Steering Committee meetings.
   - Continue Shop Local program with Chamber and community partners.
   - Provide additional space for businesses through new or existing port properties and business parks.
   - Support expansion projects that create living wage jobs.
   - Support continued rail service.
   - Place information to assist businesses on Port website.
   - Create promotional packets on facilities, land, and community as needed for business expansion opportunities.
   - Utilize marketing visits or calls to target specific types of industries and businesses for proactive expansion efforts.

   Benchmarks

   - Number of businesses requesting assistance

- Number of businesses visited, assisted, and retained
- Number of local businesses expanding operations
- Number of jobs created

Small Business & Workforce Development

- Promote the utilization of the Small Business Development Center through referrals to the regional representative.
- Continue to contribute funding and support to SBDC annual operational costs..
- Work with the schools and The Club to develop a career connected learning program that educates and trains students in entrepreneurship.
- Host at least two workshops annually on topics relevant to small business development.
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- Support Youth Coalition's mentor and internship programs.
- Support Elevate's programs.

Benchmarks

- Number of Columbia County businesses utilizing the SBDC.
- Number of SBDC Columbia County Office Hours held annually
- Track the number of website hits to the Choose Columbia County *Starting a Business* page
- Number of students and businesses participating in career connected learning program.

Business Recruitment, Marketing, and Advertising

- Utilize Washington State Department of Commerce and other business recruitment sources in obtaining and responding to leads whose criteria match Columbia County
- Market to business clusters that are similar to existing Columbia County businesses – agriculture, value-added ag, food and beverage processors, renewable energy, health and human services.
- Maintain a list of available properties and greenfield locations for new businesses to locate.
- Promote commercial buildings available for lease or purchase through one or more of the following media:
    - Portofcolumbia.org
    - Choosecolumbiacountywa.com
    - www.zoomprospector.com
    - Social media sites (i.e. Facebook)
    - Radio ads
    - Other media as appropriate
- Create promotional packets on facilities, land, and community as needed for business inquiries.
- Utilize marketing visits or calls to target specific types of industries and businesses for proactive recruitment efforts.
- Identify and attend trade shows that can foster economic development opportunities.

Benchmarks

- Number of leads responded to
- Number of properties listed as available
- Number of properties leased or purchased
- Number of new businesses that locate here

2. Provide Infrastructure

Site and Infrastructure Development

- Work with Touchet Valley Trail Steering Committee, WSDOT, and consultant to complete construction of the Touchet Valley Trail.
- Maintain Port-owned open-access fiber network.
- Seek funding for the construction of a new spec building for the Rock Hill Industrial Park.
- Seek funding for the construction of a new spec building for Blue Mountain Station.
- Seek funding to update the port-owned short line railroad.
- Continue implementation of Marina Facilities Plan.
- Support efforts to construct affordable housing options in Columbia County.
- Support a transportation funding package to address deficiencies in roads, streets, and bridges in the city and the county.

3. Maintain and improve the economic vitality of Columbia County and its communities.

Economic Profiling

- Maintain Economic Indicators on Port of Columbia website.
- Provide updated Economic Indicators at the annual Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Meeting.

Economic Development Advocacy

- Develop and communicate positions on economic development issues important to the economic health of the region.
- Develop a proactive profile by communicating economic development efforts and economic development success stories.
- Work with local government agencies to advocate for sound public policies on land use development and regulations, transportation, growth management, and the cost of doing business.
- Participate in County and City updates to their comprehensive plans. Make sure plans support proactive economic development policies.
- Coordinate with the Workforce Development Council to respond to skill gaps, meet changing industry and business needs, and increase competitiveness of area employers.
- Represent economic development interests before governmental bodies.
- Participate as a member in the Washington Economic Development Association and Washington Public Ports Association.

Community Development

- Participate in Dayton Development Task Force and support their projects

- Provide support for annual events, such as All Wheels Weekend, and area nonprofit organizations that add to the cultural interest in our community.

4. Other Important Economic Development Elements

- Tourism is important to the economic development of Columbia County. The Dayton Chamber of Commerce is the lead agency for tourism as they receive the hotel/motel tax which is the primary funding source for tourism marketing. The Port of Columbia provides financial and technical support to the Dayton Chamber of Commerce.
- The Dayton Development Task Force is the primary group that promotes downtown development and redevelopment. The Port of Columbia assists them with their projects and work. The Port also provides administrative assistance to the Task Force.
- The Port of Columbia recognizes that in the small communities of Columbia County, it is important to provide assistance to all businesses and potential businesses seeking assistance. The services of the Port and staff are available to anyone seeking assistance for a business in Columbia County.
- The underlying goal of the plan is to enhance the economic well-being of all Columbia County residents and families, including those living below the poverty line.

Definition of Roles

Port of Columbia

- Primary responsibility is coordinating and executing economic development plans, conducting the monthly Economic Development Steering Committee (EDSC) meetings, and hosting the annual CEDS meeting.

Dayton Chamber of Commerce

- The lead agency for tourism within Columbia County
- Participate in the monthly EDSC meeting
- Assist with site visitations, retention efforts, and targeted economic development initiatives.

Dayton Development Task Force

- Enhances the physical and visual assets of Dayton, including façade improvements, streetscaping, and wayfinding signs.
- Promotes downtown activities that showcase the community's unique character

Private Sector

- Provide strategic guidance to the Port in areas related to their business.
- Invest in specific identifiable economic development opportunities when available.
- Serve as advocates for public policy decisions that promote economic development.
- Assist with site visitations and retention efforts.
- Participate in monthly EDSC meeting

County and Cities

- Formulate and adopt economic policies within their jurisdictions to guide public investment.
- Provide strategic guidance to the Port in areas related to their jurisdictions.
- Invest in specific economic development infrastructure projects within its jurisdiction.

- Assist with site visitations, retention efforts, and targeted economic development initiatives.
- Provide technical support when needed, as in GMA planning support.
- Support public policy decisions that promote economic development.
- Elected official and/or administrate staff participation in the monthly EDSC meeting.

School District

- Provides updates to the EDSC on the school district's projects and needs.
- Participates in monthly EDSC meeting.

Hospital District

- Provides updates to the EDSC on the hospital districts projects and needs.
- Participates in monthly EDSC meeting.

Columbia County Transportation

- Provides updates to the EDSC on Columbia County Transportation's projects and needs.
- Participates in monthly EDSC meeting.

Community Groups (Friends of the Fairgrounds, Friends of the Dayton Community Center, etc)

- Provides updates to the EDSC on their projects and needs.
- Participates in monthly EDSC meeting as needed.

WWVMPO / Palouse RTPO

- Engages state, county and city members, as well as interested parties and the public, in cooperative planning and decision-making on transportation issues.
- Prepares plans and programs that guide federal, state, county and city investments into a multi-modal transportation network.

WorkSource Walla Walla

- Provide labor force & labor market data in support of economic development and business recruitment efforts.
- Responsive to business and industry needs for employee recruitment and training
- Partners in local initiatives that link employment services and resource to the community's needs.

Adopted this 10th day of November, 2026

PORT OF COLUMBIA BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

BY _____
Mike Spring, Chairman

BY _____
Scott Hudson, Secretary

BY _____
Johnny Watts

The 2027 CEDS Project List will replace the 2026 list once it is available

2026 CEDS Projects

The annual CEDS (Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy) list identifies specific projects that are priorities for the community in pursuit of its economic development goals. These are reviewed and updated annually in December by community leaders.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT LIST 2026

Columbia County – Lead organization. If a different lead has been designated, it is noted in bold.

Education and Training

5 years

- Continue to improve facilities of local school district to provide service from preschool to high school - **Ongoing.**
- Improve relationships with high schools and colleges, encourage WWCC (and/or WSU) to open branch or satellite office.
- Continue to expand programs at Dayton High School/Skill Center with WW School District. **Dayton Schools. Elevate, Port, Dayton SD.**
- Research community workforce needs, establish programs, and encourage active participation in regional workforce training. **Port**
- Provide incumbent worker training.
- Development of STEM programs.
- Expose students to and encourage them to enter CNA and other technical training opportunities - **Ongoing.**
- Support the Club and after-school programs - **Ongoing**

Infrastructure (Roads, river, rail, air, water, sewer, energy, telecom, solid waste, transportation, utilities, etc.)

5 years

- Improve City streets, County, State & US Highway/Road infrastructure. **City & County - Ongoing.**
- Continue Commercial Street Corridor plan implementation – **DDTF**
- Improve the water and sewer system infrastructure of the City of Dayton. **City Ongoing.**
- Obtain funding for maintenance on dike. **City/County Ongoing.**
- Long- and short-range plans for Fairgrounds (repair East Grandstand), Golf Course, and Seneca property the county has acquired - **Ongoing.**
- Create and improve walking & biking paths throughout the community, connecting Downtown, BMS, Fairgrounds, School, etc., and potentially between Dayton and Waitsburg. Bike and walking bridge over Touchet River - **Ongoing – need lead entity.**
- Seek funding to maintain short line railroad. **Port – Ongoing.**
- Seek funding under the Safe Routes to Schools program.
- Seek funding to implement recommendations from the Lyons Ferry Marina comprehensive facilities plan. **Port – Ongoing.**
- Work toward mental health and detox facilities. CCHS has psychologist on staff
- Improve West entrance to Dayton. **DDTF, City, Chamber – Ongoing.**
- Work with the private sector to address open-access broadband infrastructure needs for residential and business. **Port/County/Private Sector – Ongoing.**
- Downtown street improvement and implement Main Street Safety Action Plan (add parking by courthouse, adjust four lanes to three lanes with turn lane, speed reminders, pedestrian crossings, etc.) – **City & DOT - Ongoing.**

- Jail/Law & Justice facility **County- taking a regional approach.**
- Replace viaduct in Dayton and bridge over Snake River between Lyons Ferry Marina & Park **City/County**
- Develop a back-up power system.

10 years

- Improve railroad tracks to include passenger service. **Port - Ongoing.**
- Improve safety, access, and ADA accessibility for pedestrians on Hwy. 12 viaduct on E. Main Street.
- Remove sediment from river and find long-term solution to eliminate build-up – **City/County**

Business Development

5 years

- Continue to improve stability of local hospital district, including workforce training - **Ongoing.**
- Continue development of Blue Mountain Station Food Park. **Port - Ongoing.**
- Facilitate youth internship/entrepreneurial program in school. **Chamber/Port**
- Increase coordination with downtown businesses and the school. **Chamber**
- Develop value-added agriculture. **Port – Ongoing.**
- Facilitate small business technical assistance and workshops. **Port – Ongoing.**
- Continue to encourage development of wind generation, biomass projects, and other renewable energy projects - **Ongoing.**
- Building capacity of local contractors to get on small works rosters, Sustainable Living Center list, etc. list resources and contractors on its website. **Chamber**
- Create targeted marketing strategy for downtown business recruitment. **Chamber/DDTF/Port**
- New Industry at Lyons Ferry to take advantage of new infrastructure. **Port**
- Continue work with Choose Columbia County shop local campaign. **Chamber/Port – Ongoing.**
- Construct new speculative building at Rock Hill Industrial Park and/or Blue Mountain Station. **Port**
- Continue work on the development of the local food system.
- Help local businesses with online presence and online sales (i.e., Google, social media, TripAdvisor, etc.) **Chamber/Port – Ongoing.**
- Evaluate possibilities regarding Main Street second floor improvements.
- Develop a plan to target specific industries to look at downtown buildings through building tours and other events. **Chamber/Port**
- Address retail sales tax leakage - **Ongoing.**
- Develop a business recruitment marketing strategy with the new broadband infrastructure.

Tourism

5 years

- Develop additional opportunities for ag tourism and seasonal recreation (hunting/fishing, biking, camping, horseback riding, outfitting, skiing, snowmobiling, zip lines, signage, etc.). **Chamber/Port/DDTF/Private Sector - Ongoing.**
- Improve tourism web sites. **Chamber/Port - Ongoing.**
- Encourage the establishment of cabin rentals.
- Maintain and enhance existing railroad depot. **DHDS**
- Continue to work on the regional tourism plan through the Walla Walla Valley Rural Tourism Program. **Port/Chamber – Ongoing.**

Housing

5 years

- Address and encourage affordable housing needs in Dayton and Starbuck. **Port, City, County, Starbuck, DDTF, Community Council - Ongoing** (*Affordable housing is generally defined as*

housing on which the occupant is paying no more than 30 percent of gross income for housing costs, including utilities.)

- Develop adequate senior and retirement housing - **Ongoing.**
- Rehab community housing (possibly with CDBG funds).
- Temporary/emergency housing assistance.
- Develop a sequential housing environment.
- Consider master plan for commercial/housing mixed use development – **Port**
- Develop a homeless shelter.

Community Development

5 years

- Develop Community Center and Pool – **City/Parks & Rec - Ongoing.**
- Expand recreational opportunities at Bluewood including year-round use. **Bluewood - Ongoing.**
- Encourage youth activities, support ongoing operations of **The Club** - **Ongoing.**
- Fund and construct ADA pathways - **Ongoing.**
- Develop a community town center, including identifying potential locations.

Planning and Capacity Building

5 years

- Continue Implementation of the B&O Main Street Tax Incentive Program **DDTF - Ongoing.**
- Plan for the highest use for all industrial lands
- Encourage the community to adopt a leadership development program. **Port/Chamber - Ongoing.**
- Encourage increased volunteerism in the younger residents.

2025 Accomplishments

Education and Training:

- Dayton SD – HVAC systems and gym roof completed.
- Starbuck SD – Awarded $5.537M Small Schools Modernization Grant

Infrastructure:

- City – South 4th Street project completed.
- City – Land and right-of-way acquisition for the new wastewater treatment plant.
- City – Awarded funding to pave the balance of the levee waking path.
- TV Golf Club – Irrigation system completed for the whole course.
- Port/CWWR - $500k tie and ballast replacement from Dayton to Waitsburg
- Port – Awarded $1.3M RCO grant for pull-through camping spots at Lyons Ferry Marina
- Port/County/Inland Cellular – Starbuck fiber project and E911 upgrades in process. Port awarded $2M CERB grant and Inland Cellular awarded BEAD funding.
- City – Main Street Safety Action Plan Phase 1 funded

Business Development:

- Port – 100% Design Drawings for the Craft Malt Facility.
- Port/BMS – Two new businesses added: Hawk & Vine and Hummingbird Tea.
- Port – Completed 13-course Business Booster Training sessions.

- Dollar General – Building in process, will help sales tax leakage.

Tourism:

- Port/DDTF – New mural added
- Port/Chamber – Served on the WW Valley Regional Tourism Steering Committee
- Port – Funded radio campaigns for: Foodstock, Fall Festival and Sesquicentennial
- Chamber – Funded advertising for All Wheels Weekend and Christmas Kick Off.
- Chamber/Port – Working on updates and additions to local event calendars.
- Port/Chamber/Visit WW – Regional Branding Project completed.

Community Development:

- Parks & Rec District – Levy approved for 2nd year, location and draft design completed
- City – Installed ADA sidewalks and access points on 4th Street