

GORGE COMMISSION – SCENIC RESOURCES PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE

NOVEMBER 18, 2002, MEETING SUMMARY

White Salmon Valley Community Library, White Salmon, WA

Committee members present: Jane Jacobsen, Anne Squier, Wayne Wooster.

Other Commissioners present: Kenn Adcock, Dave Robertson.

Commission and Forest Service staff present: Keith Fredrickson, Brian Litt, Diana Ross.

Others present: Dawn Baird, Kate Bowie, Judy Davis, Jurgen Hess, Patrick Johnson, Jeanette Kloos, Michael Lang, Dave Sauter, Derrick Tokos, Eric Walker, Josh Warner, Karen Witherspoon.

The meeting opened with the Committee reviewing the draft October 29 meeting summary and Recommendations/Rationale document. Anne Squier noted the fourth sentence in the first full paragraph on Page 2 of the October 29 minutes was incomplete. She asked staff to go back over the notes and complete it. She also recommended adding the phrase “with those additions” to the last sentence in the second paragraph on Page 4. There were no suggested changes to the document on Recommendations/Rationales.

Diana Ross then presented a staff report on possible revisions to the Management Plan’s landscaping guidelines. She summarized findings of the Scenic Monitoring Report on the topic as follows: 1) agencies required trees that were too small and/or too few in numbers to adequately screen structures from KVAs; 2) planners often over-estimated the screening effects and growth rates of new trees; 3) landscaping requirements were not complied with in half the cases where new screening trees were required; and 4) landscaping (planting new trees) was never found to be a factor contributing to development being visually subordinate.

Diana continued the report by listing options for Issue 1: “Should changes to the SMA and GMA landscaping guidelines be made for more clarity, flexibility, or to improve scenic resource protection?” The options included: 1(a) Change the existing GMA guideline requiring compliance with conditions within 2 years to clarify that the development must meet the required standard within two years from the time of installation – plus add the same guideline to SMA requirements; 1(b) For both GMA and SMA, delete the “two-year rule”. Use an analysis of the amount of existing vegetative screening and other visibility factors (including off-site vegetation) to determine the necessary landscaping extent, the tree sizes needed, and the length of time to allow for growth not to exceed 5 years; 1(c) For both GMA and SMA, clarify the guideline as per 1 (a) and replace with requirements for a percentage of the development to be screened by landscaping within 2 years; 1 (d) For both GMA and SMA, delete the “two-year rule” and do not place any time limit requirements for landscaping because it is relied on too heavily and monitoring has proven it doesn’t do the job. Add guideline stating that

landscaping should not be used to meet standards unless siting, color, use of existing vegetation and reflectivity guidelines used together cannot meet the guideline; 1(e) For both GMA and SMA, delete the two-year rule and add a guideline specifying a minimum planting size for all newly planted trees to be used for screening to meet the standard. Staff recommended options 1(b) or 1 (c) as providing the greatest amount of protection while providing flexibility and clarity.

Diana followed with options for Issue 2: “Is more specificity needed to improve implementation of landscaping guidelines?” The options included 2(a) Specify approvable native species and sizes in an implementation handbook cross-referenced in the Plan. Develop approvable species and sizes for each landscape setting. Handbook would be developed by a working group such as Gorge Planners and approved by the GC Executive Director and Scenic Area Manager; 2(b) Status quo. No additional specificity needed if Issue 1 is addressed; 2(c) Adapt visibility matrix to include landscaping requirements. (e.g. Low visibility needs no additional landscaping, medium visibility landscaping to meet standard in five years, high visibility needs landscaping to meet standards in two years). Use with option 1(b). Staff recommended Options 2(a) and 2(c), noting the list would not be difficult to create, and a matrix is already planned.

Wayne Wooster then asked staff what the differences were between options 1(b) and 1(d). Brian Litt replied that 1(b) defines the process more explicitly than 1(d). Anne, referring to 1(b), said she thought the Committee was not looking at off-site vegetation because applicants have no control over actions of landowners on neighboring sites.

Wayne then asked for input from county planners and others. Josh Warner added that use of off-site vegetation is a gamble, and suggested that prioritizing factors such as topography and existing vegetation would be better tools. Judy Davis commented that people want to plant trees they can purchase at local nurseries, and that requiring large trees to be planted discourages compliance because of the cost and difficulty in planting that are involved. Dawn Baird voiced support for option 1 (d), noting that in the eastern Gorge it is difficult for large trees to thrive and that current time limits are unreasonable. Derrick Tokos expressed concerns about relying on off-site vegetation. He said a matrix could work, but that matrices become more difficult to explain as they become more intricate. He also noted that Multnomah County has found that using performance guarantees is one way of making sure compliance of some building requirements is met.

Jurgen Hess said that building height and size should be included with factors such as siting, color, etc. in option 1(d). He asked the Committee to drop the idea of a five-year rule because it could result in three additional years of non-compliance with the visual subordination standard. Jurgen also supported option (a) for Issue 2, but suggested a working group include people who have expertise with trees such as the landscape architects group and foresters. Michael Lang said Friends of the Columbia Gorge supported option (a) for Issue 1, and option (a) for Issue 2, with an amendment that landscape architects be included in the working group. He also said that the full range of comments received about scenic resource issues are not reflected in staff reports to the Committee, and suggested that the SRC meetings be recorded. Lang said Friends

supported the two-year rule, contending that visual subordination can be achieved in that time frame, and opposed options 1(c), 1(d) and 1 (e).

Karen Witherspoon pointed out that the Scenic Monitoring Report was based on the counties' early years of implementing the Management Plan, and that the counties are doing a much better job now in implementing the Plan's guidelines. She said larger trees are expensive, some have to be transported from out of the area, and many aren't surviving. Karen said trees 6 to 8 feet in height, with proper spacing, have a better survival rate. Kenn Adcock, citing the difference in tree-growth rates between the eastern and western Gorge, supported 1(d) for its practicality. He said the two-year rule is a set-up for failure, and that is a lot easier for landowners to take care of seedlings than for large trees, which do not have a good survival rate. Dave Sauter said a matrix may be complex but the tradeoff results in more flexibility for applicants.

Brian suggested the Committee consider using parts of options 1(b) and 1(d), emphasizing the need to change the two-year rule because it doesn't work from a practical standpoint. Eric Walker said that 2(a) was on target, adding the Committee should stay away from employing a matrix for landscaping guidelines. Anne noted that, at this point in the discussion, there were several "givens" – 1) guidelines will be prioritized; 2) off-site vegetation should not be considered; 3) we need clear and practical time lines regarding when plantings must be installed, and when they must achieve visual subordination; and 4) that landscaping should be installed at a reasonable size (e.g. trees in the 6 to 10-foot range) to achieve visual subordination according to the standard. She suggested those points be should be the main pieces of a recommendation crafted for Issue 1.

Michael voiced concern about moving to a five-year rule and about a "trend" his organization sees developing in an overall weakening of scenic protections guidelines. Anne replied that two years might not be enough time to ensure landscaping achieves visual subordination and that the Committee was trying to be realistic. Brian said the Committee and staff were not trying to relax standards. He said 1(b) would reduce the likelihood of using landscaping ineffectively and as a crutch to achieve visual subordination. He suggested combining the concept of prioritization of 1(d) with the specificity of 1(b). Diana followed by saying the addition of 2(a) would add practicality to the overall landscaping guidelines. The Committee then discussed how to combine options (b) and (d) for Issue 1.

Consensus was reached on a recommendation for Issue 1 as follows: "1) Landscaping should be used to meet standards only when application of other guidelines (such as siting; building height, size or design; color; use of existing vegetation, reflectivity) cannot achieve the standard; 2) If new landscaping must be used, the amount of existing vegetative screening (considering on-site vegetation only) and other visibility factors should be analyzed to determine the extent of any new landscaping, the tree sizes needed and the length of time allowed for the trees to achieve the standard. That time shall not exceed five years from the date the landscaping is installed; 3) Landscaping shall be installed as soon as practicable, and prior to project completion (issuance of occupancy

permits for dwellings). Applicants are responsible for proper maintenance and survival of planted vegetation, and replacement of such vegetation that does not survive.” The Committee also reached consensus in approving Issue 2 (a), adding that the handbook would be developed by a working group such as Gorge planners, “in collaboration with people having expertise in native tree species and landscaping.”

Brian then introduced the issue of whether revisions to scenic guidelines are needed to reconcile KVA landscaping requirements with fire protection criteria for GMA Forest zones. He outlined provisions in the plan for vegetation retention/screening and fire protection and summarized “Firewise” principles for fuel reduction zones developed by agencies with wildfire expertise. Brian said both sets of guidelines can be compatible with each other in almost all cases. He said there may be rare situations where – due to parcel configuration, proximity to KVAs and other factors – fuel break requirements could conflict with tree retention or landscaping that might otherwise have been applied to make development visually subordinate. In those cases, planners need to work with the fuel break requirements and find creative ways to make development visually subordinate.

Three options for the fire protection issue were then outlined: 1) Status quo. Provide education/training for Gorge planners about fire protection criteria regarding vegetation and landscaping; 2) Add language in scenic guidelines requiring that landscaping-vegetation retention conditions do not conflict with fuel break requirements for developments in GMA Forest zones (with the same requirement for educating and training Gorge planners); 3) Revise guidelines to include specific direction to comply with fuel break requirements and “Firewise: principles for any landscaping/vegetation retention requirements in GMA Forest zones (with the same requirement for education and training). Staff recommended option 2.

In the discussion that followed, Jurgen said that with option 2, he was concerned which would take precedence – fire safety or scenic protection. He cautioned the Committee about getting in a polarized position with the wording of the recommendation. Anne then noted that the Committee doesn’t know what fuel break requirements could be in the future and how they could impact scenic protections. The Committee then reached consensus on option 2, with a slight rewriting, that read: “Add language to the scenic guidelines requiring that landscaping or vegetation conditions in GMA Forest zones meet both scenic guidelines and fuel break requirements for those zones.”

The next meeting date of the Committee was set for Dec. 19, with the White Salmon Library as first preference. The agenda will focus on guidelines to implement new siting policy; how to prioritize the guidelines, using siting first, for new developments seen from KVAs; clarifying if KVA guidelines apply based on topography only; and guidelines implementing the visual subordination standard in developed settings. The meet was then adjourned.