

Columbia River Gorge Commission

Public Comment Meeting Minutes

June 25, 2020

via Zoom Webinar

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT

Bowen Blair
Lynn Burditt
Lorrie DeKay
Tamara Kaufman
Robert Liberty
Rodger Nichols

COMMISSIONER MEMBERS ABSENT

Bridget Bailey
Sondra Clark
Dan Ericksen
Robin Grimwade
Carina Miller
Janet Wainwright

STAFF PRESENT

Connie Acker, Administrative Analyst
Aiden Forsi, Land Use Planner
Joanna Kaiserman, Senior Land Use Planner
Lisa Naas Cook, VSI Planner
Jessica Olson, Senior Natural Resources Planner
Krystyna Wolniakowski, Executive Director

AUDIENCE PRESENT

Albrich, Elaine – Davis Wright Tremaine LLP
Bailey, Ken
Barber, Adam – Multnomah County Planning
Barker, Jillian
Beck, Mike – Skamania County Planning
Brewer, Angie – Wasco County Planning
Burns, Arlene – City of Mosier
Carter, Ann
Chapman, Kristi
Coleman, Colleen – City of Mosier
Connell, Carole
Cornelison, Peter – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Dooley, Sheila
Dou, Connie – OR State DEQ
Edwardsen, Chris
Ferrer, Deborah
Fitzpatrick, Kathleen - MCEDD
Gatz, Casey – US Forest Service
Goter, Carol
Grigsby, Sara
Hamlin, Bob – Skamania County Commissioner
Harris, Steven – City of The Dalles
Harter, Kristine
Howsley Glover, Kelly – Wasco County Planning
Johnson, Roseann
Klaas, Andrea – Port of The Dalles
Kuhta, Scott – WA State Department of Commerce

Lang, Michael – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
 Lawless, Deb
 Lumbantobing, Sharon – Clark County Community Planning
 Mahar, Richard – Skamania County Commissioner
 Mays, Rich
 McBride, Kate
 McCune, Kelly
 Moore, Thomas
 Mullett, Michael A
 O'Donnell, Jennifer
 Pipinich, Carrie - MCEDD
 Reed, Emily
 Repar, Mary
 Reynolds, Julie
 Ritchie Emily
 Rittenhouse, Ryan – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
 Shoal, Robin – US Forest Service
 Smith, Will – Wasco County Planning
 Stone, Tyler – Wasco County Planning
 Taylor, Scott
 Toepke, Jennifer – Port of The Dalles
 Tsongas, Theodora
 Turner, Elizabeth
 Watness, Philip – Skamania County Pioneer
 Zettergren, Judy

Others were present during the meeting.

Welcome remarks: U.S. Forest Service CRGNSA Manager, Lynn Burditt, and Columbia River Gorge Commission Executive Director, Krystyna Wolniakowski, welcomed everyone in attendance and described the purpose of the meeting—to hear and record public comments to the Commission and staff on the draft revised Management Plan. Lynn Burditt also provided an overview of the Gorge 2020 timeline and process over the past three years. (5:30 p.m.)



Opportunity for Public Comment: Connie Acker, Administrative Analyst with the Gorge Commission, reviewed the Public Comment Protocol. Three minutes were provided for each commenter. (5:40 p.m.)

Below is a summary of public comment offered during the forum. The complete audio recording is available at gorgecommission.org.

The following members of the public provided comment:

- Judy Zettergren
 - Studies need to be incorporated in the Climate Change Chapter with a focus on impacts to water. Population pressure and decreased precipitation rates affect water resources. Look at water modeling in the gorge and the Pacific Northwest.

- Use Urban Area Boundary “minor” definition endorsed for inclusion in the Draft Management Plan at the May 26th Commission meeting.
 - Recommend in-depth regional analysis of the current Urban Areas in the gorge and determine resources and needs. Development plans for all Urban Areas should look at water modeling in the gorge.
- Dr. Theodora Tsongas, environmental health scientist, lived in Pacific Northwest for 25 years
 - Little analysis in this Plan of climate change impacts; needs to be significantly improved. Climate disruption is a significant and urgent threat to biological systems and ecosystem services in the National Scenic Area. Need a plan to assess and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Include a near target date of one-year or less to adopt a Climate Action Plan that requires the following:
 - Allow no reduction in habitat protections.
 - Prohibit loss of or damage to wetlands.
 - Limit new dwellings in forested areas.
 - Prevent conversion of forest land to protect carbon sinks.
 - Protect and increase stream, lake, and pond buffers.
 - Ensure no changes to Urban Area Boundaries are made because economic benefits of local urban areas are dependent on protection of the scenic, ecological area.
- Peter Cornelison, Hood River resident for 20 years, speaking as an individual.
 - Support including the following in Final Management Plan:
 - Implement a 200-foot vegetative stream buffer on streams and rivers that enter the Columbia River to protect cold water refuge habitat for salmon and other fish.
 - Limit urban sprawl by requiring a regional analysis of the development potential in all existing Urban Areas.
 - Support defining “minor” revision to be up to 20 acres or 1% of the land area of the Urban Area, whichever is less.
- Arlene Burns, Mayor of the City of Mosier. Will be submitting written testimony.
 - Concerned about water temperature in two creeks that enter the Columbia River in Mosier. Buffers on the creeks just outside of the city and outside the Scenic Area are either nonexistent or clearcut areas.
 - Support no expansion of Urban Areas because previous inventory in Urban Areas shows that smart growth can occur; need to first focus on density in Urban Areas.
 - Include a target completion date of one year for Climate Action Plan.
 - Consider accelerating Vital Sign Indicators program.
- Angie Brewer, Planning Director for Wasco County. Will be submitting suggested text revisions accompanied by letters to Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development and Governor Kate Brown’s office, as well as documents provided since 2016 with concerns and suggestions about process and engagement.
 - Strongly encourage a revision to Gorge Commission rules to require formal notification of affected landowners for all future updates.
 - Formally request that the Gorge Commission consider leaving the public comment period open until at least July 15, 2020 to allow for additional comments. Concerned that 30 days to review 500 pages is a timeframe not many individuals and organizations can accommodate.
 - Concerned that the Gorge 2020 project offered an inadequate public participation process and that the Gorge Commission did not seek funding from states or counties to ensure ability to send a formal notice by mail to all affected landowners and residents. Stakeholder engagement was inconsistent and County planning director participation in preliminary technical teams has been inappropriately characterized as support for the final draft. Draft Management Plan does not adequately address county requests for added clarity, expanded lists of expedited review uses, or streamlined paths for government agencies who are conducting resource enhancement projects in partnership with rural residents to reduce wildfire risk, preserve water, and improve habitat.

- Draft Management Plan does not provide a balance of resource protection and development: references to residents have been removed, county roles have been diminished, new programs have been added to reduce rights, and Urban Areas have been capped forever through definition of “minor.”
- Kate McBride, providing comments as Mayor of the City of Hood River and as a private citizen, noted below.
 - (Mayor) Encourage the Gorge Commission to plan for the climate change chapter in the next year; aligns with the Hood River County Energy Plan adopted by the City of Hood River, Hood River County, Port of Cascade Locks, and Port of Hood River.
 - (Mayor) City of Hood River updated housing needs analysis estimated that Hood River Urban Area can accommodate estimated population growth for about the next 17 years. Planning department is working to add density in appropriate ways.
 - (Private citizen) Support definition of “minor” for Urban Area Boundary revision as 20-acres or 1% of land within each Urban Area, whichever is less.
 - (Private citizen) Support requirement for coordinating temporary closures of recreation sites and trails when fire risk is high and when there is a public safety power shut-off by Pacific Power and Light or PGE.
- Rich Mays, Mayor of the City of The Dalles
 - Oppose the proposed definition of “minor” for Urban Area Boundary revision as 20-acres; this caps the City’s ability to expand. Sorosis Park in The Dalles is 40-acres; under this proposal, the City would only be able to expand by one-half the size of this park. If the Commission is looking for a hard number, the City proposes a range of 7-10% of the City’s total acreage.
 - Need to grow and expand the tax base to be able to provide economic benefits for The Dalles. Any economic development in Dallesport does not contribute to property tax revenue in support of the County, schools, park system, or any other local government on the OR side of the Columbia River.
 - Request a compromise on Urban Area Boundary language, which is not 20-acres or 1%, for all time. A compromise offers a pathway acceptable to the Gorge Commission and stakeholders.
- Elaine Albrich, offering comment on behalf of the Port of The Dalles
 - Concerned about proposed definition of “minor” for UAB expansion. Under this proposal, if each of the 13 Urban Areas sought a revision and were able to satisfy the 4(f) approval criteria, about 170 acres could be added to the Urban Areas in total forever. 170 acres is a 0.6% increase in the total Urban Area acreage; this is about 0.06% of land in the National Scenic Area. The 20-acre definition amounts to about a 0.36% increase for The Dalles, a 0.6% increase for White Salmon, Bingen, and Stevenson, and a 0.83% increase for Hood River. These numbers are too low, are absolute limits on growth, and do not ensure that an application is “minor,” but rather that it is de minimis.
 - Mentioned several examples of expansion in Oregon as context: Nyssa (town of about 990 acres) added 281 acres in 2019; Bend (20,000 acres) added 2,380 acres in 2016; and City of Springfield (about 10,000 acres) added 781 acres in 2016. Acknowledged that these examples are not in a National Scenic Area and do not have to comply with 4(f) criteria.
 - Commission’s definition of “minor” is arbitrary and inconsistent with the intent of the Act.
- Sara Grigsby
 - Appreciate that climate change is formally recognized in the Draft Management Plan. Support other comments made tonight regarding advocacy for stream buffer protections associated with forest practices.
 - Support a net zero loss of land when considering Urban Area Boundaries. Do not want to lose any National Scenic Area land to Urban Areas. Recognize that there are trade-offs between resource protection and growth.
 - Would like to see language in the Management Plan that explicitly describes the Commission’s oversight role in working with local land use agencies on permitting and inspection.
- Andrea Klaas, Executive Director for the Port of The Dalles

- Extremely concerned with proposed Urban Area Boundary language; this is effectively a no-growth policy. The Port has previously submitted comments and suggestions and will be providing additional written comments by June 30th.
 - Concerned that the economic development chapter revision is limiting opportunities for value-added agriculture, including agritourism. Need to have a balance between protecting scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources and protecting and supporting the economy of the Columbia River Gorge. Revisions to the Management Plan will affect the livelihoods of those who live and work here for the next 20-30 years.
 - Encourage the Gorge Commission to consider providing additional time for public comment and push back the date to vote on Plan adoption.
 - The Port of the Dalles unanimously passed Resolution 20-004 opposing proposed Urban Area Boundary revisions on June 10, 2020.
- Sheila Dooley
 - Support proposed definition of “minor” revision for Urban Area Boundaries. In 2018, a buildable lands inventory for The Dalles determined that only 232 acres would be needed of the 480 acres available. Higher density development in Urban Areas is needed, rather than expanding boundaries.
 - Support development of a Climate Change Action Plan with a one-year timeline for completion that includes the following:
 - No loss of wetlands.
 - Reduction of fire risk on forest lands by limiting dwellings.
 - Adequate stream buffers of 200 feet.
 - Protection for species such as salmon, Western pond turtle, and pika; do not allow mining, development and logging in pika habitat.
- Roseann Johnson, Government Affairs for Metro Portland Home Builders Association, will be submitting a joint letter with Oregon Home Builders Association by the comment deadline.
 - Given differences in OR and WA land use planning and the COVID-19 pandemic, Association urges the Commission to defer any Urban Area Boundary policy amendments in order to further engage with Oregon land use and housing agencies and the public.
 - National Scenic Area Counties need more flexibility to balance preservation and growth. Policies 8b and 10b set arbitrary, inequitable, and unrealistic criteria with disregard for OR land use planning laws. To allow Hood River and Wasco Counties to respond to their housing needs over time, Association requests deletion of proposed policies 8b (definition of “minor”) and 10b (requiring Counties to consider lands on both sides of the Columbia River).
 - Regarding policies 1, 4, and 5, encourage Commission to develop clearer and more objective County notice and application timelines.
- Bob Hamlin, Chair of Skamania County Board of County Commissioners, Member of Mid-Columbia Economic Development District Executive Board, and resident of National Scenic Area General Management Area
 - Request an additional 30 days for public review and comment on the Draft Management Plan; need additional time for the Board of Commissioners to go through Skamania County staff comments. There is a lot of information to review, and the proposed changes will affect people for at least 10 years. An additional 30 days will not make this process more cumbersome.
- Ryan Rittenhouse, works for Friends of the Columbia Gorge, providing comment as a resident tonight
 - Request more commitment to climate change; include a one-year target for adopting a Climate Action Plan. While the Commission did contract with a consultant to complete a high-level climate change impacts study, suggest that additional studies be commissioned on the most vulnerable aspects of the Gorge to climate change and specific protections needed. Examples of these protections include buffers on streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes to protect sensitive species.
 - Concerned about Urban Area Boundary expansion and connection with climate change and environmental protection. Previous studies indicate that there is adequate land for development; should focus on high density development, rather than expansion. Time and resources spent on

Urban Area Boundary revisions have distracted from other Commission priorities; support moving on to other topics.

- Michael Lang, Friends of Columbia Gorge, will be submitting written comments.
 - Acknowledged the numerous opportunities for public involvement and comment throughout the four-year Gorge 2020 process, including on the topic of Urban Area Boundary revisions.
 - There is currently a surplus of vacant or underutilized land within the 20,500 acres of land set aside for urban development in the gorge. This is nearly double the acreage of all state park lands in the National Scenic Area. Dallesport has 6,500 acres that is mostly vacant.
 - Support broadening regional analysis of buildable lands and opportunities for growth in all 13 Urban Areas before any Urban Area Boundary is revised. Support tying the proposed definition of “minor” to an analysis of need for all Urban Areas.
- Deb Lawless, property owner in Coyote Syncline area
 - Primary goal of the CRGNSA is preserving natural resources; this drives economy through tourism and recreation opportunities. Should be no further loss of wetlands, forests, or waters. Simple mitigation is not enough, and Commission should be making efforts to improve ecosystem health. Should be tracking keystone species and monitoring impacts of climate change, development, and recreation on forest and water health. Need a specific and measurable plan to address impacts of climate change.
 - Oppose increasing Urban Area Boundaries; support the Draft Management Plan’s position on urban development.
 - Agree with Friends of the Columbia Gorge recommendations for strengthening the Draft Plan language.
- Carole Connell, former planner in Oregon
 - Support protecting watersheds and improving survival of fish; 200-foot stream buffers are critical.
 - Recommend some acknowledgment that OR Forest Practices Act offers weak protection for streams. Need to consider WA and CA forest practices rules that are more protective.
 - If buildable lands inventories show there is land available for development, these areas should be used first. Can amend the Management Plan to allow for expansion later if future inventories support it.
 - Need policies and guidelines on climate change immediately.

Closing Remarks (6:35) Gorge Commission Administrative Analyst, Connie Acker, asked if anyone else wanted to provide comments. Hearing none, it was decided to end the meeting early. Gorge Commission Executive Director, Krystyna Wolniakowski, stated that the audio recording of the public comments provided during this forum will be uploaded and available to the public on the Gorge Commission website, gorgecommission.org. Director Wolniakowski and U.S. Forest Service CRGNSA Manager, Lynn Burditt, thanked all attendees and those who provided comment. The public comment period is open until 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, June 30, 2020.

Adjourn (6:45 p.m.)

Approved 8/11/2020