

Columbia River Gorge Commission

Meeting Minutes
January 14, 2025
via Zoom Webinar

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT

Elaine Albrich
Erin Black – USDA Forest Service
Laura Brennan Bissell
Valerie Fowler
Robert Liberty
Carina Miller ~ 8:35 a.m.
Michael Mills
James Morgan
Pah-tu Pitt – 8:33 a.m.
Nathan Reynolds
Dr. Ashley Thompson
Amy Weissfeld

COMMISSIONER MEMBERS ABSENT

Jerry Meninick

STAFF PRESENT

Mackenzie Aamodt, Land Use Planner
Connie Acker, Finance & Administration Manager
Lisa Naas Cook, Climate Action Program Manager
Sage Ebel, Natural Resource Planner
Kelly Foster, Public Records & Administrative Analyst
Bryce Guske, Senior Planner
Colin Jarvis, Climate Corps Fellow Intern
Joanna Kaiserman, Senior Planner
Jeff Litwak, Legal Counsel
Mike Schrankel, GIS Manager
Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director

AUDIENCE PRESENT

Stephen Archer – Clark County
Nathan Baker – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
David Becker
Phil Brady – Wasco County
Lynn Burditt – USDA Forest Service
Sam Charlie
Sheila Dooley

Adam Fiss – Washington Regional Transportation Council
Kevin Gorman – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Jamie Howsley – Jordan Ramis PC
Larry Keister
Madison Kenney – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Andrea Klaas – Port of The Dalles
Ilene Le Vee
Terra Lingley – Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT)
Steve McCoy – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Rodger Nichols
Beatriz Parga – Bridal Veil Lodge B&B
Shari Phiel – The Columbian
Mary Repar
Tyler Stone – Wasco County
Sean Streeter
Bryan Telegin – Telegin Law PLLC
Sofia Urrutia-Lopez – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Holly Williams – Washington State Parks

Others were present during the meeting.

Call to Order and Roll (8:30 a.m.) Chair Michael Mills called the meeting to order, and Connie Acker called roll.

Oral Argument on *Friends of the Columbia Gorge, et al. v. James D. Howsley and Clark County*, CRGC No. COA-C-23-01. (8:31 a.m.) The Gorge Commission held oral argument on the above appeal filed by Friends of the Columbia Gorge and several individuals. The Gorge Commission heard oral argument from the parties and began deliberating to an oral decision.

The following commissioners made disclosures of ex parte communications and potential conflicts of interest:

Commissioner Robert Liberty stated that he was a member of Friends of the Columbia Gorge before being appointed to the Gorge Commission almost 10 years ago and served on the board of directors for Friends between 35 and 40 years ago. He noted that Friends filings noted receipt of newsletters that had articles about not this matter, but the Washougal Pit. Commissioner Liberty stated that he never read them and was not aware of them until the filing by Friends. He has been a hearings officer in the past and is capable of making his decision based on the evidence in the record and the law.

Commissioner Carina Miller stated that she believes she received Friends' list serve emails but does not recall reading them or what the content was, so she believes can remain impartial in this matter.

Commissioner Michael Mills stated that he was a past member of Friends of the Columbia Gorge but resigned when he was appointed to the Gorge Commission. Commissioner Mill stated that Mr. Howsley represented him and his brothers as the Mills Family, LLC in the past and that his records indicate the last time the LLC last paid Mr. Howsley in October 2021 for work done in August 2021. He stated he can be impartial and fair in this case.

Commissioner Elaine Albrich stated that she knows Mr. Baker and Mr. Howsley in a professional capacity and the land use bar but has nothing to disclose. She stated that she can be fair and impartial in this case.

Commissioner Amy Weissfeld stated that she was a past member of Friends of the Columbia Gorge but not while she's on the Commission. She noted that Friends disclosed newsletter sent to her but that she did not recall seeing or reading anything about this case. She stated she can be impartial.

Chair Mills asked the parties if they had any questions or wished to challenge any commissioners from hearing this case. No party raised any objection.

The Commission asked questions that they wanted the parties to address in their oral argument. The parties presented their oral argument and the Gorge Commission asked questions of the parties.

Break – 10:34 – 10:51 a.m.

Commission Questions, Discussion, and Deliberation (10:51 a.m.) The Commission then discussed the case and began deliberating. The following motions were brought before the Commission for vote:

Columbia River Gorge Commission Meeting - January 14, 2025	
Motion 1	
Motion	Liberty
Seconded	Albrich
I move to deny the motion to dismiss on the basis that the matter is not moot, but if the decision is moot, the Commission can and does review it under the public interest exception under Sorensen and Hernandez as was done in the Norway Green proceeding, a decision upheld by the Superior Court.	

	Yes	No	Abstain
Albrich	x		
Brennan Bissell		x	
Fowler		x	
Liberty	x		
Meninick			
Mills	x		
Morgan	x		
Pitt	x		
Reynolds	x		
Thompson		x	
Weissfeld	x		
Miller	x		
Total	8	3	0

The motion passed.

Columbia River Gorge Commission Meeting - January 14, 2025	
Motion 2	
Motion	Liberty
Seconded	Mills
I move that the hearings examiner erred in interpreting the code in finding that the drainage ditch was not an existing structure on the undisputed facts in the record.	

	Yes	No	Abstain
Albrich			
Brennan Bissell			
Fowler			
Liberty			
Meninick			
Mills			
Morgan			
Pitt			
Reynolds			
Thompson			
Weissfeld			
Miller			
Total	0	0	0

The Commission chose to continue this motion to the February 11, 2025, Commission meeting when the hearing is continued.

Columbia River Gorge Commission Meeting - January 14, 2025	
Motion 3	
Motion	Mills
Seconded	Miller
I move to continue the remainder of the hearing to the February 11, 2025, Commission Meeting.	

	Yes	No	Abstain
Albrich	x		
Brennan Bissell	x		
Fowler	x		
Liberty		x	
Meninick			
Mills	x		
Morgan		x	
Pitt	x		
Reynolds		x	
Thompson	x		
Weissfeld	x		
Miller	x		
Total	8	3	0

The motion passed.

Break – 1:14-1:25 p.m.

Approval of December 10, 2024, Commission Meeting Minutes (1:25 p.m.) Commissioner Reynolds moved to adopt the December 10, 2024, meeting minutes, and Commissioner Albrich seconded. The December 10, 2024, Commission Meeting Minutes were approved by a voice vote.

Commissioner Morgan abstained as he was not in attendance at the December 10, 2024, meeting.

Land Acknowledgment (1:26 p.m.) Mike Schrankel read the Land Acknowledgment.

Treaty Tribe Word of the Day (1:28 p.m.) Commissioner Pitt shared: waxshxwt, meaning downpour. Pitt shared that water that comes from the sky is a blessing.

Opportunity for Treaty Tribe Nations to Address Commission (1.30 p.m.) As part of the Government-to-Government consultation process, the Commission welcomes input from Treaty Tribe Nations on any issue on the agenda and other matters. The Treaty Tribe Nations did not offer testimony.

Public comment on items related to the National Scenic Area (NSA) not on the agenda (1:31 p.m.)

- Oral Public Comment – There was no public comment offered.
- Written Public Comment
 - Mary Repar (Attachment B)

Committee Reports (1:32 p.m.) The Communications and Rules Committees provided updates to the Commission.

- **Communications Committee** – Commissioner Weissfeld reported:
 - The committee determined its purpose was to improve communication with the public, including tribes, various stakeholders, interested parties, and partners.
 - The committee will focus on reviewing the website language for the next six months with bi-monthly meetings.
 - Also discussed other communication goals:
 - Sharing emergency information
 - VSI program updates
 - In the process of defining a method for website review, recognizing that there is a lot of text. The committee will review top-performing pages based on Google Analytics.
 - The committee needs guidance on how the Commission will review the website copy. Should it be on the agenda, or should bits and pieces be discussed as needed?
- Commissioner Fowler:
 - Referenced the Columbia Insight article imagining the Gorge without the NSA; noted many comments said “oh no” about all

development, others said limitations are working well, and a third group still felt a lot of things are prohibited.

- Noted the wildfires in Los Angeles can galvanize a focus on mitigating wildfire risk in the Gorge. Comments expressed beliefs that metal roofs are not allowed. Proposed awareness efforts to help the public understand how the Gorge Commission has responded and made more uses allowed over time.

- **Rules Committee** – Jeff Litwak, Counsel, reported:

- The rules committee discussed the scope of work.
- The committee is discussing how to review draft rules updates; still awaiting feedback and comments.
- The committee will meet at the end of January or early February and hopes to have a scope for the Commission and plan for review after that meeting.

Commissioner Comments and Questions

- Commissioner Weissfeld raised two Communications Committee questions:
 - Asked if the Commission would allow the Communications Committee to contact Rodger Nichols and Columbia Insight regarding the Gorge Commission's position on metal roofs and solar panels.
 - No objections were raised.
 - Bryce Guske, Planner:
 - Noted that there is a blanket restriction on reflectivity that must be worked around.
 - Various conditions on the site can impact roofing guidelines.
 - Commission staff try not to impose restrictions on fire hardening.
 - Staff have been actively working on updating the Scenic Area Handbook, including defensible space guidelines handouts with guidance for home hardening.
 - Commissioner Fowler: Suggested that the handbook would complement initial outreach but also encouraged outreach at this time.
 - Commissioner Albrich: Requested that counties be included in review of the handbook and rollout plans.
 - Commissioner Weissfeld: Asked if the Commission wanted to be apprised of, vote on, or approve changes to the website.

- Chair Mills: Proposed having changes run past the Commission for “thumbs up.”
 - Commissioners agreed to this process.

Executive Director’s Report (1:47 p.m.) Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director, and staff provided brief updates:

- **2025-27 Oregon and Washington Biennial Budgets:** Acker reported that the 2025-27 Washington and Oregon Governor’s budgets have been released. Acker explained the budget match needed.

2025-27 Budget Comparison WA and OR Governor’s Budgets

	WA Governor's Budget		OR Governor's Budget	
	Washington	Oregon		
Joint Operating Budget				
Current Service/Carryforward Level	1,560,000	1,569,000	1,672,827	
DES Central Services	4,000	4,000		
OFM Central Services	8,000	8,000		
Updated PEBB Rate	(1,000)	(2,000)		
Pension Benefit Amortization	(4,000)	(2,000)		
Non Rep GWI	53,000	43,000		
			(3,026)	Statewide DAS Charges
Misc Adjustments	60,000	51,000	(3,026)	
POP/DP #1 - ADRP 3	350,000	350,000	350,000	Recommended
WA DP #2 - PR & Admin Analyst	108,000	-	-	
WA DP #3 - DEI Outreach	50,000	50,000	-	Included in Maintenance
	508,000	400,000	350,000	
2025-27 Total Joint Budget	2,128,000	2,020,000	2,019,801	
	(108,000)	-	-	
2025-27 Total Joint Budget Match	2,020,000	2,020,000	2,019,801	

- **2024 Financial Statement Audit:** Connie Acker, Finance and Administration Manager, reported that the 2024 Financial Statement Audit concluded with an audit exit conference on December 19, 2024. Vice-Chair Mills attended the meeting. The auditors had no findings to report. The final audit report has been released, emailed to Commissioners, and uploaded to the Commission’s website.
- **Access Database Replacement – Phase 2** – Mike Schrankel, GIS Manager and Access Database Replacement Project Coordinator, reported:
 - Staff completed configuration training.
 - Staff are completing user acceptance training.
 - Go-live is scheduled for mid-February.

- The Klickitat County application portion of the project, known as Civic Access, needs additional work before it is released, and staff start accepting online applications.
- **Best Practices Survey for Calendar Year 2024:** Wolniakowski reminded Commissioners to complete the Best Practices Survey by February 19, 2025.

Commissioner Comments and Questions

- Commissioner Albrich:
 - Asked about past requests to increase outreach and DEI.
 - Asked about the connection between the PR role and outreach.
 - Wolniakowski: Noted PR Analyst is Public Records and Administrative analyst; explained backlog of records and connection to ADR project and ongoing need for administrative support.

USDA Forest Service Report (2:02 p.m.) Erin Black, Acting Forest Supervisor for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, provided updates on Forest Service activities in the National Scenic Area:

- Comments on the Northwest Forest Plan Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are due mid-March; an in-person meeting is scheduled for February 13, 2025, at the Stevenson Community Library.
- The agency is no longer pursuing the National Old Growth initiative.
- Donna Mickley is returning next week.
- Thanked the Commission for allowing her to participate in Commission meetings.
- Acknowledged the professionalism of Wolniakowski and Commission staff.

Other Business (2:05 p.m.)

- **2025 Executive Committee appointments and schedule**
 - Meetings are scheduled for the last Tuesday of the month at 8:30 a.m.
 - Appointments are:
 - Commissioner Meninick - Chair
 - Commissioner Mills - Vice Chair
 - Commissioner Elaine Albrich
 - Commissioner Donna Mickley
 - Commissioner Nathan Reynolds
 - Commissioner Amy Weissfeld

- **Schedule for the Executive Director's 2024 Annual Performance Review**

- Acker sent materials to Chair Mills, and he will distribute them to Commissioners.
- Acker requested responses by January 24, 2025, but additional time can be granted if necessary.

Adjourn – 2:10 p.m.

Meeting Attachments:

- Attachment A – Public Comment – Mary Repar
- Attachment B – Staff Report - Best Practices Survey of the Commission for CY 2024

Approved – February 11, 2025