Columbia River Gorge Commission
Communications Committee
Meeting Summary
August 13, 2026

Chairing: Commissioner Alex Johnson, in the absence of Chair Weissfeld

Meeting format: Virtual

Call to Order and Roll Call

Commissioner Alex Johnson called the meeting to order at approximately 9:02 a.m., following confirmation that the meeting was being recorded. A quorum was established.

Committee Members Present:

- Commissioner Steve Hochman
- Commissioner Alex Johnson

Committee Members Absent:

- Commissioner Lach Litwer
- Committee Chair Amy Weissfeld

Staff Members Present:

- Krystyna U. Wolniakowski
- Connie L. Acker

Commissioner Abby Hall participated as a listener; staff noted that her appointment to the Communications Committee had not yet been finalized.

Approval of June 18, 2026, Meeting Summary

The committee reviewed the June 18, 2026, meeting summary. Staff noted that the summary had been generated with assistance from AI and subsequently reviewed. Minor spelling corrections were identified.

Commissioner Johnson moved to approve the meeting summary with minor spelling corrections, and Commissioner Hochman seconded. The motion was approved.

The committee discussed the usefulness of AI-generated meeting summaries. Members agreed that AI can significantly reduce staff time, but those summaries must be reviewed for accuracy before finalization.

Key takeaway: AI-generated minutes/summaries should be treated as a draft requiring human review rather than as an automatically reliable record.

Cross Committee Communications and Newsletter

Commissioner Hochman initiated a discussion on improving communication across Commission committees. He proposed using committee proceedings, decisions, accomplishments, and other updates, particularly from the Economic Vitality Committee, as recurring content for Communications Committee outreach. The discussion built on previous conversations about creating a Commission newsletter. Members agreed that brief summaries of committee meetings could provide a practical source of content for the newsletter.

Staff noted that capacity is a concern because development of a newsletter would compete with work on the 2026 Annual Report. Staff also discussed the potential assistance of Sage Ebel with graphic and communications work.

Commissioner Hochman volunteered to help develop a newsletter and to work with staff on formatting and content. He proposed testing whether AI could help transform committee meeting summaries into concise newsletter content.

The committee agreed to conduct a trial using recent AI-generated committee summaries. Staff will provide Commissioner Hochman with summaries of recent committee meetings, including the Executive, Rules, and Economic Vitality Committees. Commissioner Hochman will use these materials to develop a trial newsletter-style product for staff review.

Staff also agreed to begin using AI-generated summaries for Economic Vitality Committee meetings and evaluate the results.

The committee emphasized that the process should be iterative and that all AI-generated content should be reviewed by staff before publication.

2026 Annual Report

Staff presented a proposed approach for the Commission's first formal annual report. Rather than the brief legislative summaries used in prior years, staff proposed developing an approximately eight-page, visually engaging report highlighting accomplishments and priorities.

The proposed report would be modular, allowing individual sections to be shared with legislators, partners, or other audiences based on their interests. For example, sections concerning climate work or other specific Commission initiatives.

Members supported developing an annual report and noted that it would:

- Improve public understanding of the Commission's work.
- Provide useful material for legislators and stakeholders.
- Reach audiences who may not regularly visit the Commission website.

- Provide an appropriate communications opportunity during the Commission's 40th anniversary year.

The committee recognized that staff capacity may make it difficult to produce both an annual report and newsletter. Commissioner Hochman's volunteer assistance with the newsletter may make it possible to pursue both.

The annual report will remain a primary staff responsibility, with staff developing it for anticipated completion in January.

Stakeholder Distribution
The committee discussed the importance of intentionally distributing the annual report and other communications to key stakeholders.

Staff reported that the Commission maintains an email list of approximately 600 recipients, with categories that allow communications to be targeted at specific groups.

Commissioner Hochman recommended developing an intentional distribution approach to ensure key stakeholders are included.

40th Anniversary Planning

Staff provided an update on discussions with the U.S. Forest Service regarding opportunities to collaborate on the Commission's 40th anniversary.

Forest Service Collaboration with 40th Anniversary Planning
Beth Kennedy, Forest Service Public Affairs Officer, described a potential fall event at a Forest Service site, possibly Eagle Creek Overlook. The concept could include:

- A campfire, subject to fire restrictions and conditions.
- S'mores or other informal refreshments.
- Historical context concerning recreation in the National Scenic Area.
- Recognition of partnerships among agencies and organizations working in the Gorge.

The Forest Service is also soliciting ideas from its staff and plans to develop a broader list of possible anniversary activities.

Other ideas discussed included:

- Joint tabling at Multnomah Falls during the summer.
- Hikes or other outdoor activities involving commissioners.
- Additional partner events throughout the anniversary year.
- Social media collaboration and cross-posting between the Commission and Forest Service.

Kennedy confirmed that the Forest Service can share Commission posts on its Facebook page, particularly for 40th-anniversary content.

November Commission Meeting
Staff confirmed that an in-person Commission meeting is planned for November. Staff are seeking an affordable venue and have contacted Skamania Lodge but received no response.

The meeting may include:

- An informal reception or light refreshments.
- Key speakers.
- Activities commemorating the 40th anniversary.
- A 40th anniversary table runner/banner that can be used throughout the anniversary year.

Anniversary Planning List
Staff and the Forest Service plan to compare their respective anniversary brainstorming lists. Staff expect to have a more developed set of ideas ready for the September Commission meeting.

Legislative Tour and Outreach

The Commission had previously considered conducting a legislative tour in late August. After learning that Friends of the Columbia River Gorge was organizing a congressional tour, the Commission agreed to participate in that event rather than duplicate it.

The Commission will participate in the upcoming tour luncheon and provide brief remarks. The Forest Service will also participate.
Commissioner Johnson and staff emphasized that the Commission should maintain its own legislative outreach strategy and conduct a separate legislative tour later in the year, allowing some time between the two efforts.

Policy and Budget Communications

Staff reported that the Oregon budget request had been submitted and that work was underway on the Washington budget components, with a draft expected within approximately two weeks.

No additional public-facing budget communications materials are needed at this stage.

Staff explained that the Commission's more active budget advocacy generally occurs after the governors' recommended budgets are released in December. Until

then, communications with legislators will primarily be informational rather than requests for specific budget support.

Public Comment

Lynn Burditt provided historical context regarding the Commission's 25th anniversary. She noted that a broad community coalition had helped organize anniversary activities and recommended considering a community-led approach for future anniversary planning.

Burditt suggested that Commission staff look for historical files from the 25th anniversary to identify how the effort was organized, including potential community leadership structures, participants, and funding approaches.

Commissioner Abby Hall supported developing strategic anniversary activities and suggested opportunities to connect the Commission's communications work with the Economic Vitality Committee. Potential ideas included highlighting Gorge businesses that align with the Commission's mission.

Commissioner Hall also discussed the possibility of a joint 40th anniversary op-ed with a Multnomah County commissioner. Commissioner Hochman volunteered to help coordinate a concrete list of anniversary communications and events. Commissioner Hall agreed to work with him to develop the list and, if appropriate, bring it to the Commission or the Communications Committee for consideration.

The committee also discussed engaging county-appointed commissioners as points of contact with their respective counties.

Action Items

#	Action Item	Responsible	Timing
1	Correct minor spelling/name issues and finalize the June 18, 2026, meeting summary.	Staff	As needed
2	Send recent AI-generated summaries from the Rules Committee and Economic Vitality Committee to Commissioner Hochman for a newsletter trial.	Connie/staff	Between meetings
3	Begin testing AI-generated meeting summaries for	Wolniakowski/staff	Next meeting cycle

	Economic Vitality Committee meetings and evaluate accuracy and usefulness.		
4	Develop a trial newsletter/newsletter-style communications product using committee meeting summaries.	Commissioner Hochman	Before next Communications Committee discussion
5	Have staff review and vet the trial newsletter content before any external distribution.	Wolniakowski, Ebel, & staff	Following draft
6	Continue developing the approximately 8-page 2026 Annual Report, with modular sections suitable for different audiences.	Wolniakowski/staff	Target: January
7	Develop an intentional stakeholder distribution strategy for the annual report, using the Commission's categorized email lists.	Staff/Communications Committee	During annual report development
8	Continue exploring an affordable venue and program for the November in-person Commission meeting/40th anniversary gathering.	Wolniakowski/staff	Before November
9	Develop and maintain a joint list of potential 40th anniversary activities with the Forest Service.	Wolniakowski/staff & Beth Kennedy/ Forest Service	Compare lists the following week; report at September Commission meeting
10	Explore cross-posting 40th anniversary content between the Gorge Commission and Forest Service social media channels.	Staff & Forest Service	Throughout anniversary year

11	Participate in Friends of the Gorge's upcoming congressional tour and provide brief Commission remarks.	Wolniakowski/ Commission representatives	Upcoming Monday
12	Plan a separate Commission legislative tour later in the year or subsequently, distinct from the Friends of the Gorge tour.	Staff/Commission leadership	Future planning
13	Develop a concrete list of 40th anniversary communications/events, potentially including op-eds and strategic community events.	Abby Hall & Steve Hochman, with staff support	Bring forward for committee/Commission consideration
14	Search Commission files for materials from the 25th anniversary to identify useful precedents for community-led anniversary planning.	Wolniakowski & Acker/staff	Future planning
15	Explore opportunities to engage county-appointed commissioners and their counties in anniversary planning and outreach.	Communications Committee/ Commissioners	During anniversary planning

Adjournment

There being no further business, Commissioner Johnson adjourned the meeting.

Meeting adjourned: Approximately 9:43 a.m.

Approved – September 24, 2026