

Communications Committee

Meeting Highlights

May 19, 2026

Commissioners Present:

Amy Weissfeld, Chair
Lach Litwer
Alex Johnson
Steve Hochman

Staff Present:

Krystyna Wolniakowski
Connie Acker
Lisa Naas Cook

Review of Meeting Summary

After roll call, the April 9, 2026, Communication Committee summary was approved by a voice vote. Chair Weissfeld abstained.

Best Practices

Commissioners Hochman and Johnson talked about the draft Best Practices for Media inquiries. Chair Weissfeld sent some initial comments, but these were not sent out to all the committee members. She requested that the document include a proactive approach to communications, not just a reactive approach to media inquiries.

Chair Weissfeld reiterated from her email she sent earlier that this document is centered around reactive responses, rather than using our own microphone to tell our story. Responding only when warranted puts the agency on the defensive. She believes this document needs an explicit statement that the Commission has an affirmative obligation to inform the public about its work, mission, and decision-making — not just to correct errors when they occur. Along these lines, she would also like to revise section 4.1 so the “three-part test” governs reactive responses to criticism, but is clearly distinguished from the Commission's proactive voice, which should not require a triggering event. In addition, she suggested that more discretion in the reactions are needed as well.

This change would lead to expanding Section 3 or adding a new section on proactive communications strategy — regular cadence, key messages, and how commissioners can serve as authentic ambassadors within their communities. A section on relationship-building communications is missing— engagement with local media, community organizations, and elected officials that happen *before* a controversy, not in response to one.

Chair Weissfeld also brought up responding to former Commissioner Robert Liberty's comments. She stated that if we do not respond, then we leave it to other people to tell the story.

Commissioner Johnson said the purpose of the document is to help staff and commissioners determine if, when, or how to respond to media inquiries. Small agencies with no communications staff are in a difficult position to determine if they should respond or not or elevate it to the commissioners. The purpose of the document is to capture some of the scenarios that have, or may happen in the future, and best practices for responding.

Chair Weissfeld requested that a more proactive approach be included in the final document before it goes to the full commission for review. In addition, she brought up responding to emails from constituents and making sure someone responds to them, so if Krystyna responds and other commissioners were also copied, there should be a way to let commissioners know that the agency has responded. It is up to individual commissioners if they want to acknowledge a particular email.

Connie commented that she receives all the correspondence and always finds the person who is best to respond. Chair Weissfeld made the point that if she gets an email, she replies but it is important to know that someone else from staff will also respond. Krystyna reiterated that staff, or an appropriate other person, responds to all emails the agency receives. Chair Weissfeld and Commissioner Hochman appreciated that information. Krystyna also addressed the comment about reacting to Robert Liberty's statements that what we wanted to do was thank him for his eleven years of service and not get into a debate about his comments that not everyone agreed with. Krystyna stated that when the OPB "Think Out Loud" interview came up with Robert Liberty, she asked OPB to include a sitting commissioner as well, and they did so by inviting Commissioner Johnson to participate. Chair Weissfeld emphasized that we need to grab the megaphone and state our positions more vocally.

Commissioner Johnson offered to take another look at the document to try to make it more proactive about communications with the media and Chair Weissfeld will also take another look and provide comments before the next Communications meeting.

Wildfire Communications

Chair Weissfeld has reiterated the importance of communicating about wildfire risks. She asked about our communication strategy and what we should be doing about wildfire communications. Lisa Naas Cook, Climate Program Manager, discussed that the Klickitat County Wildfire Hub has a place on their website for communications, including our Defensible Space information. Lisa asked for clarification about how best the Commission can

communicate related to wildfire. Chair Weissfeld said that we should let people know what wildfire resources are available. Krystyna pointed out that Lisa has been at meetings that drew more than 140 community members in Hood River and got the messages out. Lisa suggested a story for social media that we are a part of the All-Lands group and engaged with different counties to prepare a bus tour related to best examples of defensible space in the Gorge.

Chair Weissfeld asked about the agency email listserv and Connie mentioned that we have over 500 people and use it as an additional communications tool. Lisa suggested that the listserv could be a good distribution for a short update related to fires. Curating this might take time. Connie mentioned that we received a newsletter from Underwood Conservation District which was a good format.

- ✓ An action item is to find examples of newsletters that might be easy to follow as a template and could be distributed as part of an email listserv. Krystyna suggested reformatting the Executive Directors report as a newsletter.

Connie mentioned that she sends information to the distribution list. She said it was a distribution list via Microsoft. Commissioners asked to explore different formats that could be used to prep the newsletters and mockup an attractive way to communicate events of the Gorge Commission. Krystyna will bring this up at the next staff meeting to see what options are available given staff resources, time, capacity, and availability. At the next CommComm meeting, commissioners will continue discussing the use of emails to get newsletters out to constituents.

Commissioner Hochman made a comment asking about how the agency and commissioners “show up” for the community and established a track record of results, specifically how we all work together.

Public Comment

Lynn Burditt commented that newsletters and comment sheets are helpful and how best to communicate with the public and legislators. Having worked with government entities, she said newsletters can be successful, or maybe not. She suggested that links to different resources should be identified and made available.

Final Comments and Follow-up Actions

Next meeting will be scheduled on June 18 at 9:00 am.

Action items:

- Send the Best Practices for the Media Inquiries to committee members for final editing/comment

- Identify the next steps for emailing a “newsletter” or a “newsflash” with an attractive format.