Communications Committee
Meeting Highlights
April 9, 2026

Commissioners Present
Amy Weissfeld, Chair (absent)
Lach Litwer
Alex Johnson
Steve Hochman
Pah-tu Pitt (absent)

Staff Present
Krystyna Wolniakowski
Connie Acker

Review of Meeting Summary
After roll call, the Communication Committee summary for March 12, 2026, was approved by a voice vote.

Draft Communications Best Practices
Commissioner Johnson prepared and distributed a Best Practices document just before the March 12, 2026, meeting. The following were highlights from the committee discussion:

Krystyna kicked off the discussion by noting that Commissioner Johnson captured some very important aspects of the Commission's work communicating with the media and legislators, especially given recent media attention. She also noted that this Best Practices guide is very helpful. Commissioner Johnson stated that there has been a lot of media attention and requests for quotes from commissioners and staff, and that he wants to simplify communication and address gray areas in communications with journalists and policymakers. The document is meant to be purposeful and to provide guidelines. The committee reviewed the document page by page.

He asked the committee to review it and see whether it clarifies the process for responding to articles and media inquiries – does it help clarify when and how to respond? He suggested six "core principles" (Section 3.1) drawn from various public agency sources.

Commissioner Litwer asked whether this was more oriented toward responsiveness than a proactive approach and thought it was a good approach. Commissioner Johnson clarified that this should help guide staff and commissioners in responding to the media, since there was no founding document specifying when and how to respond. Commissioner Hochman stated that the transparency standard drives everything else. Krystyna noted that this document is particularly helpful in ensuring that our staff and

commissioners' responses are consistent with this guidance and not based on personal preference.

Commissioner Johnson said that there have been a number of recent articles about commissioners and the Commission's work, and that there is a need to determine when the agency should respond and when it should not. He recommended that the Commission respond promptly to false accusations or misinformation. Responses should be fast and clear, and the Best Practices provides the decision framework.

Commissioner Hochman pointed out that under Section 6.2, "Debunking Protocol," number 7 states that "re-direct to mission" is an important point, meaning being able to move forward – not just debunk the information but also act proactively. (Krystyna suggested that the numbering system needs to be corrected.)

In Section 7, "When Commissioners are Named," Commissioner Johnson noted that Commissioners have been named in articles and that, in some cases, strategic silence may be the best approach.

In Section 8, "Scenario Based Decision Framework," Krystyna noted that using the real situations described was immensely helpful in this document as a practical guide.

Krystyna asked everyone to review this document again. Commissioner Johnson said that discussing this document with the full Commission would take longer than we have at the next meeting. He recommended passing it out of committee, bringing it before the full Commission at some point, and approving it as a policy document. Krystyna suggested sending it to the Executive Committee for review first, then sharing it with the full Commission at the July 2026 meeting.

New Website Analytics

The new Gorge Commission website is now live, and Connie summarized the analytics. See users, their locations, which pages they visit, maps, and upcoming meetings. It is gathering information, and more will be available over time. What information does the Communications Committee want to gather? Krystyna mentioned an inquiry from Singapore – many people use VPNs, so they may not actually be located there. What information should the analytics capture, and at what intervals should they be checked? Commissioner Johnson mentioned that trends are the most valuable information – increases or decreases in website visits? Topics? It is a snapshot in time when monitored – he suggested that the committee take 5 minutes during each communications committee meeting to review trends.

Draft Press Release on Klickitat County Online Permitting System

The Oregon and Washington budgets were not yet approved at the time of this meeting, so no press release has been issued. Krystyna said that after budget approval, a press release can follow. Mike provided an overview of the online permitting system platform for Klickitat County and the links for applying for permits in the other 5 counties. Staff envision that this tool will serve as a pre-application, since a full application will require more one-on-one time with the landowners to determine exactly what is needed.

Bryce stated that it is a way to obtain materials from applicants, such as one applicant with exceptionally large files, and that the transfer makes it quite easy. Online applicants can see the status of where the applications are in the process, and it is a more effective way to communicate by exchanging documents with applicants. There are also instructional videos prepared for the Commission by ESA Associates that applicants can view to help them navigate the permit process. There is no substitute for in-person consultations with applicants, but it can help obtain initial documents for the pre-application and for document submissions throughout the process.

Krystyna will prepare a press release to inform Klickitat County residents about the online permitting platform when it is ready to go live.

Public Comment

Lynn Burditt recommended that we identify other counties that offer online permitting as part of the press release. She observed that landowners who buy properties may not have information from realtors about the permitting process. She encouraged the realtors group to have a basic understanding of the NSA permit process. She also recommended contacting each county about the Klickitat County online permitting process so they are not surprised by it. Finally, she complimented Commissioner Johnson on his thoughtful approach to the Best Practices document.

Action items:

- Krystyna will send the Best Practices document to the Executive Committee for review.
- When the funds are approved and the online permitting system is ready to launch, the Commission will issue a press release and ensure that it clearly states that it applies only to Klickitat County.

Approved: May 19, 2026