Economic Vitality Committee
Meeting Summary
May 6, 2026

Commissioners Present:
Lach Litwer, Chair
Steve Hochman
Laura Brennan Bissell (absent)

Staff Present:
Krystyna Wolniakowski
Connie Acker

After roll call, the April 4, 2026, Economic Vitality meeting summary was approved by a voice vote. Krystyna explained that Commissioner Pah-tu Pitt has withdrawn from the Economic Vitality Committee but will remain on the Rules Committee.

Discussion with Guest Megan Gibb, Multnomah County

Megan Gibb, the Land Use Planning Director for Multnomah County, was invited to provide an overview of her experience with land use planning in the National Scenic Area and to share her perspectives on how the Gorge Commission can support economic vitality in Multnomah County. She previously worked at Metro for 15 years, focusing on long-range planning, land use planning, housing, public-private partnerships, and the grants program. She joined Multnomah County 1.5 years ago. She noted that 90% of county lands are farms and forests.

One of their biggest concerns is farmers and the economic viability of farms. Only 20% can sustain a living from farming, and the rest require other sources of income. Some limitations in the NSA –

- For a full review of an NSA permit, the fee is $4800 because it requires more time. There needs to be more flexibility, such as increasing the 60-square-foot limitation for sheds and the agriculture income test.
- Second, commercial buildings with businesses such as the former Tad's Chicken and Dumplings need more flexibility to resume operations after they closed due to the pandemic, under the 'discontinued use" provision. Having flexibility to keep the original zoning and use is necessary to make the best use of these historic structures.
- Third, support for tourism is needed, including shuttles, "park and rides," paid parking, and e-bike rentals, all of which are modern needs. More flexibility is needed to accommodate the reality of tourism.
- Also mentioned were Accessory Dwelling Units – Airbnbs are only allowed in urban areas, not on rural lands, and ADUs are not allowed on lands zoned for farming. However, there is growing interest in providing multi-generational housing by allowing ADUs. ADUs can

diversify the housing stock and help people stay in the communities they come from.

Chair Litwer stated that the committee has been exploring ADUs in relation to housing availability and affordability. He noted that ADUs are often connected with Airbnbs, yet they are separate issues and are regulated by different policies and zoning rules, so they should not be connected. Chair Litwer asked whether it is possible to have a discussion that separates the need for ADUs in the NSA from the Airbnb discussion. Megan agreed that it is possible to separate them, given the recent discussions with the Multnomah County Planning Commission.

Commissioner Hochman asked Megan about the status of the recruitment for the new Multnomah County appointee to the Gorge Commission. She stated that they were in the process of vetting candidates and expected to make a decision soon.

Krystyna asked clarifying questions about the historic structures and the issues related to supporting uses that may have been discontinued due to COVID. Megan replied that parking was an issue, as were non-conforming uses or discontinued uses due to covid. Chair Litwer also asked if Megan had any ideas for reducing friction with some of the management plan requirements. Megan mentioned that there needs to be flexibility for smaller projects that do not have an impact to go through a less bureaucratic process. She also discussed the fee structure, noting that even simple projects can carry high fees. They are trying to find ways to reshape the fee structure based on income levels as well. They will be conducting a fee assessment in the next year.

Krystyna also noted that these issues will be discussed during the 2027-2029 Plan Review process and that this process will also require additional time from the counties for discussions and for making recommendations for any revisions. Krystyna and staff will work with the counties to prioritize the pain points that the counties have identified.

Chair Litwer brought up cultural resources and the process we and the counties follow for cultural resource reviews. Krystyna explained that the Forest Service archaeologist identifies areas of high probability on sites where a development application is pending. Chair Litwer asked whether the cultural review could occur before the fees are charged. Megan agreed that this should be an area to look into in the future, since the cultural review requirements can be a barrier.

Commissioner Hochman asked about the issues that are highest priority, and Megan said the paid parking issue is a high priority.

Public Comment

Mary Repar commented that farmers should receive tax breaks and insurance payments to make their lives easier. ADUs are for making money and are not needed in the NSA. Cultural reviews are needed for all developments, since pre-1986 developments did not have them.

Follow-up for Next Steps

Chair Litwer recommended that ADUs be looked at for further study and Commissioner Hochman agreed.

Krystyna mentioned that the last meeting focused on agriculture and that the full notes were included in the meeting summary. She recommended that the agriculture income test be reviewed again to determine whether the "one size fits all" approach works, given the diversity of agriculture and the many different parcel sizes.

Chair Litwer asked for the purpose of the income test and what standards we apply to achieve its goal. He asked whether it was a filter or a barrier – he would like more staff time to devote to this issue to determine whether it should be a priority and to bring it to the full commission.

Krystyna also reminded the committee about the 5-year Economic Vitality Plan, co-authored by MCEDD with the Gorge Commission and the Forest Service, and requested that someone from the committee review the draft report before submitting it to the legislature at the end of 2026.

Public Comment

- Mary Repar asked whether the Gorge Commission has a policy on earthquakes. Krystyna said we do not have a specific policy on earthquakes, but we do have a provision for rebuilding after disasters such as earthquakes and fires. She also invited the Commissioners to the Interpretive Center in Stevenson for Bird Walk and Talk on May 16 to walk the trails – Ryan Gilpin will give a presentation. Also, on August 22, there will be a Zoom with Dr. Chad Hanson, who wrote Smokescreen, to debunk the myth of wildfires and climate change at the Stevenson Library.

Other Business:

No other business was discussed

Approved: July 1, 2026