



June 30, 2020

Robert Liberty, Chair
Columbia River Gorge Commission
57 NE Wauna Avenue
White Salmon, WA 98672

Subject: Gorge 2020 Management Plan Urban Area Boundary Revision Policies

Dear Chair Liberty and Commissioners:

The Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Portland (“HBA”) and Oregon Home Builders Association (“OHBA”) together represent over 850 companies and tens of thousands of women and men who work in the residential building industry throughout Metro Portland and the Columbia River Gorge Area. We promote housing affordability and maximum housing choice for residents in each of Oregon’s unique regions.

HBA and OHBA appreciate the Columbia River Gorge Commission’s (“Commission”) recent efforts to clarify and define urban area boundary revision criteria. However, we are gravely concerned that the Growth Management Plan’s proposed revision policies are too restrictive. The policies reflect an anti-growth attitude that would prevent National Scenic Area (“NSA”) communities on both sides of the Columbia River from expanding their urban areas to accommodate needed housing. The restrictive policy implications are particularly germane to Oregon’s urban areas, where state-regulated urban growth boundaries mean there is less available land for housing. **Oregon communities need more flexibility to achieve a reasonable balance of preservation and growth.**

Importantly, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Commission failed to adequately engage with the public on this extremely consequential issue. As such, we strongly urge you to **defer any urban area policy amendments to a further date** in order to meaningfully engage with Oregon stakeholders.

However, if the Commission does move forward, we request you consider the following revisions:

Remove Policies 8B and 10B. These two Policies set arbitrary, inequitable, and unrealistic criteria which disregard Oregon’s land use planning laws. Policy 8B would limit the expansion of urban areas to the lesser of 20 acres or 1%, cumulatively, over time, capping available land at an arbitrary threshold and ultimately prohibiting Oregon NSA cities from meeting their state-required 20-year land supplies for needed housing. As an unintended consequence, these cities could then expand onto valuable farmland outside of the NSA in order to meet state land use requirements.

Policy 10B would require Oregon NSA counties to account for land supply in Washington urban areas that adjoin or are ‘near’ to NSA Columbia River bridges. This is inequitable for Oregon’s urban areas because they include less land available for housing than their counterparts in Washington. Oregon’s needs are not intrinsically linked to growth in Washington, which is subject to different land use planning laws and projected development rates. Yet by artificially linking land supply across the two states, this policy could inadvertently cripple Oregon’s response to its needed housing.

Revise Policy 8 to define other clear and objective minor revision criteria. Policy 8 is problematic because it does not differentiate between different types of land within urban areas. While HBA supports ensuring communities are able to make objective minor revisions to their urban areas, the Commission should include other minor criteria that reflect its land priorities while considering unique characteristics and needs of the community. Such additional criteria should consider the geographical context of previous zoning, land for certain housing types, affordability, and densities, along with land for open space and alternative transportation infrastructure.

Policies 1, 4, and 5 would effectively allow the Commission to unreasonably deny any revision application. These policies tie boundary revisions to subjective budget decisions which could result in inaction given historic budget constraints. The Commission should **replace the subjective language in these policies with clear and objective notice and application timelines.** Furthermore, given that Oregon’s periodic land use planning updates occur on an as-needed basis, the Commission should **amend Policy 6 to allow counties to submit applications to the state on their own timeline,** eliminating an arbitrary regulatory burden.

Policies 7, 12, 13, and 14 defer key policy decisions to rulemaking, bypassing the critical need for state stakeholder engagement. The Commission should amend Policy 7 to reflect how it will **coordinate with Oregon housing and land use planning agencies.** It should also amend policies 12, 13, and 14 to further **outline how revision applications can comply with the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act section 4(f) compliance criteria.** Doing so now is crucial for communities to have revision process clarity.

HBA and OHBA appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed policies. Ten of the policies require substantial changes in order to provide communities with the tools they need to implement NSA preservation and development goals. We urge the Commission to incorporate our proposed policy modifications, and establish clear roles and responsibilities, which will empower its implementing partners, and promote housing affordability throughout the National Scenic Area.

Respectfully,



Roseann Johnson

HBA Government Affairs Assistant Director



Ellen Miller

OHBA Government Affairs Director