Cowlitz—Wahkiakum Council of Governments

Communiqué

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NEW WEB SITE

Please visit our revised website: www.cwcog.org

Kalama seeks input for its downtown design standards

The Kalama Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on September 20th at 7:00 p.m. in City Hall to receive comments on its proposed design standards for the central business district. Kalama citizens see its downtown as a center of commerce as well as a natural gathering place for residents living on the hilly terrain. While residents enjoy the charming downtown, most impressions of the city are realized by those traveling along Interstate 5. From that perspective, the city may seem to have an array of architectural styles which may deter potential patrons. The goal of the proposed standards is to promote commerce throughout the downtown by enhancing its architectural appeal.

Proposed for new and existing buildings are discretionary and required standards. The discretionary standards are an "a-la-carte" menu of architectural elements to include in the building design, while the required standards are mandatory. For existing buildings, a structural alteration or expansion triggers the need to meet the new standards. A visual representation of how the standards may be applied is located at Kalama City Hall.

For more information, contact Matt Hermen at 577-3041 or attend the public hearing on September 20th at 7:00 p.m. in the Kalama City Hall.

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COG program and project updates

Fire and Ice Scenic Byway proposal: COG staff are wrapping up contract work with the Washington State Department of Transportation, the agency handling the federal funds recently awarded to the COG for examining the feasibility of establishing a formal national scenic byway designation that would link the Columbia River Gorge and White Pass Scenic Byways. We are preparing to solicit consultants for project proposals and forming a project steering committee. The initial kickoff meeting will be on October 26, 2011 at the Cowlitz Regional Conference Center located at 1900 - 7th Avenue, in Longview, at 10 am.

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COG program projects and updates (continued)

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Shoreline Master Program Updates: Cowlitz County, area cities, COG and State Department of Ecology staff have been meeting to craft a coordinated project to begin overhauling shoreline master programs. The state legislature has provided funding and set a target due date of December, 2014 for completion of the new master programs. Local jurisdictions should see contracts from the COG for getting the work underway over the next month or so.

Here are a few highlights of the projects and programs on which staff are currently working.

SR 432/433 rail and highway environmental documentation: The COG has hired a project coordinator, Darlene Sharar, to oversee a comprehensive effort to conduct an environmental analysis of projects for rail and highway improvements in the SR 432/Industrial Way corridor. The COG received $2 million from the state transportation budget for the project and is seeking other funds to bolster its depth and breadth of analysis. We will launch a search for consultant services this fall and should have a team in place by the first of the year.

Cowlitz County Tourism Plan: COG staff and the Cowlitz County Tourism Bureau will begin developing a strategic plan to examine regional tourism opportunities in order to advance efforts to diversify the county economy. Tourism stakeholders will develop a comprehensive vision for Cowlitz County tourism that will include the Tourism Bureau, Hoffstadt Bluffs and Silver Lake Visitor Centers, and the Regional Conference Center. The project will be supported by Cowlitz County, its incorporated cities, chambers of commerce, private business owners, and tourism agencies. We expect the plan to be completed by October, 2012.

Hoffstadt Bluffs Visitor Center with Mount St. Helens in the background

Cowlitz County Comprehensive Plan Update: COG staff and a fifteen-member county commissioner appointed steering committee are in the midst of their work with city staff and community leaders to organize and facilitate future land use discussions and stakeholder outreach. The committee meets regularly on the first and third Thursdays of each month from 4-6 pm at the Cowlitz County Historical Museum in Kelso. You can find meeting notices and important information about the Comprehensive Plan posted on the Cowlitz County website at: http://www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/buildplan; then click on Comprehensive Plan Update. Your involvement is greatly appreciated!

HUD Sustainable Communities grant application: The initial threshold review was favorable and COG staff is preparing the full application for a Sustainable Communities Planning Grant for Cowlitz and Lewis counties which is due October 6th. If funded, the grant would create a "Sustainability Overlay" that could be woven into existing plans and a number of local initiatives.

Vulnerable Populations Emergency Plan: A state CDBG Planning-Only Grant for $24,000 has been awarded to Cowlitz County. This will enable COG staff to continue working with Cowlitz DEM and the local disaster coordination group to begin Phase 2 of the project. This involves the development over the next year of operational guidelines for high-priority response strategies.

Homelessness and Housing: COG staff has prepared grant applications for about $1.5 million in state funds that will be funneled through Cowlitz County as lead agency for the Housing & Essential Needs (HEN) program and the Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG) program. Staff is also working with the County Office of Financial Management to prepare requests for proposals for HEN, CHG, and use of local document recording fees, totaling over $2 million. The process involved creating application forms and evaluation criteria to determine project awards later this fall. All projects are scheduled to begin by January 1, 2012.

COG welcomes new staff member

Darlene Sharar has joined the COG staff team as transportation special projects manager for the State Route 432/433 rail and highway improvements project. She will oversee the development of environmental analyses that meet rigorous state and federal requirements.

Darlene has over 25 years of technical transportation engineering experience with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), including nine years in management. Her experience includes coordinating multiple projects, conceptualizing and implementing changes, and delivering projects. At WSDOT, she advanced from an entry level technician to management as a Transportation Technical Engineer 5. More recently, she worked in development review as the Chelan County Public Works Development Review Manager.

On the personal side, Darlene "tries to golf, wants to kayak, and loves to take road trips." She is pursuing additional college degrees in her spare time. She says, "I am looking forward to working for the CWCOG by meeting and serving our broad customer base!"

Save the dates

Cowlitz County Strategic Tourism Plan Kick-off Meeting

Date: Thursday, October 20, 2011
Location: Cowlitz Regional Conference Center
1900 - 7th Avenue
Longview, WA 98632

11:00 am-1:00 pm: Guest Speaker George Sharp will be speaking about new innovations for tourism and developing a successful tourism plan. Space is limited to Tourism Advisory Board members and Big Idea Board of Directors.

1:00-3:00 pm: Strategic Tourism Kick-off Meeting with the Cowlitz Tourism Advisory Board and the Big Idea Board of Directors.

For more information and to RSVP, please contact Jennifer Keene at jkeene@cwcog.org or call 360-577-3041.

Fire and Ice Scenic Loop Kick-off Meeting

Date: Wednesday, October 26, 2011
Time: 10:00 am to 12:00 pm
Location: Cowlitz Regional Conference Center
1900 - 7th Avenue
Longview, WA 98632

Come kick off the Fire and Ice Scenic Loop Corridor Management Plan (CMP). Review the two scenic byways of White Pass and Columbia River Gorge. Give input to the CMP process.

Contact Jennifer Keene at jkeene@cwcog.org or call 360-577-3041 to receive information about the kick-off meeting.

August COG board meeting highlights

- Corey Balkan, Interwest Benefits Consultants, and Sasha Hinners, Southwest Washington Wellness Committee, reported about the results of the recent three month "Thrive Across America" employee wellness participation event utilized by members of the COG's Medical Insurance Rate Stabilization Pool program;
- COG staff reported on the pending submittal of an application to the federal Housing and Urban Development agency (HUD) for a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning grant, to be submitted by the COG as lead for the Cowlitz-Lewis Economic Development District by the end of September;
- COG staff informed members of the receipt of a discretionary grant from the Federal Highway Administration for a feasibility study of a proposed "Fire and Ice" Scenic Byways program, linking the Columbia River Gorge and White Pass Scenic Byways; and
- A report was given on the status of the SR 432/433 rail and highway improvement environmental documentation project; the denial by US Department of Agriculture of our application to help sponsor a series of "Stronger Economies Today" (SET) training sessions; the efforts underway by staff and area leaders and groups to address the future of the COG's community mobilization program; and how the COG will coordinate updates of Cowlitz County and its cities shoreline master programs (by 2014 per the state legislature).

For more information, contact the COG office.

1975 Annual Report déjà vu

- Completed the regional Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Comprehensive Park and Recreation Plan including recreation elements for each entity; it also contains a historical and cultural element and a trails systems element.
- Developed a bike plan for Cowlitz County which set forth bikeway corridors of federal, state and local significance and proposed a system of priorities for development.
- Completed a park site plan for the Skamokawa Recreation District; and assisted Wahkiakum County with a plan for the Fairgrounds Park adjacent to the proposed Skamokawa Park.
- Assisted Cowlitz County with the completion of the first draft of the county's comprehensive plan.

October 2011 calendar

Oct 6 & 20	4:00 pm	CC Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee	CC Historical Museum, Kelso
Oct 11	8:00 am	Wahkiakum Information Forum	River Street Building
Oct 17	3:30 pm	Cowlitz Substance Abuse Coalition and Cowlitz Meth Action Team	Kelso Presbyterian Church
Oct 19	1:30 pm	Cowlitz Housing First Coalition	CAP Altrusa Room, Longview
Oct 26	1:30 pm	Housing Advisory Committee	CAP Altrusa Room, Longview
Oct 27	**12:00 pm**	**COG Board Mtg**	**CC Admin Bldg., GMR**
Oct 27	3:30 pm	Cowlitz Area TAC/RPACT	CC Conference Room B

TITLE VI and ADA Notice to the Public
COG ensures full compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the American Disabilities Act of 1990 by prohibiting discrimination against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex or disabilities in the provision of benefits and services resulting from its federally assisted programs and activities. For more information, or to obtain a Title VI Complaint Form, call program coordinator at (360) 577-3041.

ENHANCING 50 OUR REGION CWCOG COWLITZ-WAHKIAKUM COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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