

# MINUTES

## Oregon Sustainability Board



**Meeting Date:** March 14, 2025

**Time:** 9:30 am to 2:30 pm

**Location:** Zoom and Western Oregon University

**Attendees:** OSB: Rex Burkholder (Chair), Johanna Anderson, Webly Bowles, Taneea Browning, Serena Dietrich, Josh Proudfoot, Elin Shepard, Tom Kelly,  
DAS: Steven Markham, David Wortman, Jeni Hall

**Guest Presenters:** Nora Apter and Dave Vantoff (Climate Solutions), Shaun Houston (Wester Oregon University-Sustainability Department), Michael Slater (Chair, City of Salem Planning Commission), Chris Wilson (DAS Procurement Services Grants, Loans, and Program Manager)

### Welcome 9:30 – 10:00 am

Meeting called to order, agenda discussed, and December Minutes Approved

### Legislative outlook 2025: introduced bills and Board role. - Nora Apter and Dave Vantoff from Climate Solutions 10:00-10:30 am

Nora Apter, Oregon Director for Climate Solutions, and her colleague Dave Vantoff, presented on the Oregon Clean Tech Task Force. This task force, launched by Governor Kotek and Senator Wyden, aimed to leverage federal funding from the Inflation Reduction Act and capitalize on the global shift towards clean energy technologies. Apter highlighted the task force's comprehensive approach, addressing challenges in industrial land availability, incentives, procurement, energy capacity, research, innovation, entrepreneurship, talent, and workforce development. The task force's report, a "sweeping roadmap," included recommendations for bolstering incentives, supporting strategic procurement, and fostering talent development. A significant portion of the discussion centered on strategic procurement, with Apter detailing how state, local, and regional public purchasing can incentivize in-state clean tech manufacturing. She emphasized the potential for cooperative purchasing agreements and the importance of prioritizing locally produced clean energy technologies.

Transitioning to the 2025 legislative session, Apter outlined Climate Solutions' priorities, focusing on policies and investments to achieve Oregon's climate and clean energy goals while ensuring energy affordability and community resilience. Transportation, a major source of emissions, was a key area of focus, with the upcoming transportation package presenting a critical opportunity for investment in clean, safe, and affordable transportation options. Apter then addressed the pressing issue of rising utility costs, detailing several key bills. SB 88 aimed to limit the expenses utilities can charge ratepayers, ensuring that lobbying and advertising costs are borne by shareholders. HB 3081 focused on expanding access to clean and cost-saving technologies like heat pumps, particularly for low-income households, by bolstering the Oregon Department of Energy's Navigation Assistance program. HB 3546, the Power Act, sought to ensure that energy-intensive industries, like data centers, pay their fair share of grid infrastructure costs, addressing the strain these industries place on the grid. Apter also addressed grid capacity and energy challenges,

highlighting the need for grid-enhancing technologies (HB 3336) and expanded transmission capacity (HB 3628) to meet Oregon's 100% clean energy mandate. The rapid growth of energy demands, particularly from data centers, was identified as a significant threat to grid capacity and costs, necessitating innovative policy and funding solutions. Due to time constraints, the meeting was concluded with a plan for a future Q&A session and continued monitoring of legislative activities.

## **Board Legislative Discussion and Work Planning**

**10:30am- 12:15 pm**

The discussion centered on refining the work plan and identifying agencies where the board could have the most impact, with a focus on energy, resiliency, and equity. It was emphasized that it's important to refine the work plan and identify areas where the board can have the most influence. Energy, resiliency, and equity were highlighted as key areas of focus. There was a need to consider how to work with agencies effectively, whether through sustainability offices or agency leadership. The Environmental Justice Commission and other boards and commissions were identified as potential collaborators. Business Oregon was also considered, with a focus on energy and resiliency.

The board aimed to define its goals for the next two years, focusing on agency support and influencing agency leadership. The board wanted to look back in two years and identify what they accomplished and the difference they made. Supporting agencies with plans and implementation strategies was a key goal. Influencing the thinking of agency leadership (administrators, directors, boards) was also important. The board aimed to leverage its expertise to help agencies achieve their missions. A collaborative and supportive approach was favored over an adversarial one.

There was a discussion on how to proceed with the work plan and whether there was enough direction. The board discussed how to proceed with the work plan. All the areas of focus seemed important, with housing being a cross-cutting issue. Housing and Community Services was highlighted as important due to its connection to where people live. The list of agencies and focus areas was considered a good starting point.

The need for further explanation of the connection between the general direction and specific actions in the work plan was raised, and the discussion moved on to scheduling time for the plan guidelines. There was a need for clearer explanation of how the general direction and specific actions in the work plan were connected. The board would schedule time to discuss plan guidelines.

A work plan was introduced and sought feedback, focusing on revising guidelines, sustainable design guidelines, legislative changes, and collaboration with other commissions. Key components of the work plan included revising the sustainability planning guidelines, developing sustainable design guidelines, considering legislative changes to the act, and collaborating with the Environmental Justice Council and the Climate Action Commission. There was an emphasis on programmatic focus and targeted direction in the guidelines. Support for creating guidelines that reflect "heroic pragmatism" was sought. The legislative changes would involve updating the language of the act to include climate and resiliency. Collaboration with the Environmental Justice Council would involve discussing key indicators for their mapping tool. Joint work sessions or participation by board members were suggested for collaborating with other commissions.

The board discussed potential collaboration on the Governor's housing needs and shared information about the Department of Energy's report on state agency energy use. The board could potentially help with the Governor's housing needs. Housing intersects with resilience (floodplains, fire), pollution, and energy systems. Many low-income individuals live in existing buildings that lack modern standards. The Department of Energy had released a report on state agency energy use. The report highlighted a siloed approach to energy management within state agencies.

It was suggested that the board could help state agencies decarbonize their building portfolio and address the issue of unified authority and coordination. The board could help state agencies decarbonize their

building portfolio. There was a challenge in creating a unified response to decarbonization due to the lack of unified authority across agencies. The board could potentially help with coordination efforts.

A discussion ensued about the feasibility of the board's involvement and the need for more information, with a suggestion to focus on fleet electrification and agency coordination. The board discussed whether this initiative would require legislative or gubernatorial action. There was a newly renovated federal building in downtown Portland that could be a potential opportunity. The board should focus on transmission, generation, and storage. The conversation shifted to the Department of Energy's role and the need for more information. There was a focus on fleet electrification and agency coordination.

The discussion continued about agency coordination, with a focus on ODOT and the Climate Office, and the board was encouraged to engage with agencies and offer help. ODOT and the Climate Office were highlighted as potential collaborators. The Climate Office was seen as an advocate for climate within ODOT. The board was encouraged to engage with agencies and offer assistance. Agencies like the Department of Agriculture were seen as being receptive to the board's input.

Judith Callens from the Department of Agriculture, guest attendee, expressed excitement about the Climate Smart Agriculture initiative and confirmed the existence of a bill related to a resilient sustainability commission around food supply. Judith Callens confirmed that the Climate Smart Agriculture initiative was a priority for the Department of Agriculture. She also confirmed that a bill related to a resilient sustainability commission around food supply was alive and expected to go through. The board should add this potential commission to their list of entities to coordinate with.

The board discussed how to prioritize their work and focus on areas where they could have the most impact. They considered the balance between short-term actions and long-term thinking. Responding to requests for partnership and collaboration was also a priority. The Environmental Justice Council's work on the mapping tool and indicators was timely and offered a collaboration opportunity.

It was suggested adding energy and resiliency to Business Oregon's focus, and the board discussed how to define their goals and areas of influence for the next two years. Jenny suggested adding energy and resiliency to Business Oregon's focus. The board discussed how to define their goals and areas of influence for the next two years. They aimed to identify agencies where they could have the most impact. They also wanted to determine which agencies were able and willing to leverage the board's expertise.

The board discussed how to work with different agencies and their boards and commissions, with a focus on influence and direction. The board considered how to work with different agencies and their boards and commissions. They discussed whether to engage with agency boards or sustainability offices. The Board of Forestry and the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) were mentioned as examples of boards and commissions. The board aimed to provide influence and direction to agencies.

The challenges of engaging with agencies and the need for clear direction were discussed, and the board considered using the biennial report as a tool to communicate their mission and value. Engaging with agencies could be challenging, with varying levels of responsiveness. There was a need for clear direction and leadership to guide agency action. The biennial report could be used as a tool to communicate the board's mission and value to other agencies, commissions, and boards.

Rex suggested including information about the board's mission and value in the two-page summary, and the discussion moved on to the next agenda item, with a focus on agency work plans. Rex suggested including information about the board's mission and value in the two-page summary. This information could also be included in a letter to the legislature. The board transitioned to discussing agency work plans. There were questions about the relationship between general directions and specific actions in the work plan.

It was suggested on the topic of agency work plans and proposed using them as a framework for organizing meetings and focusing on major themes. It was proposed using the work plans as a framework for organizing meetings and focusing on major themes. This would involve ensuring agenda time for these themes and getting the right people involved.

The board outlined the key areas of focus for the work plan, including revising guidelines, sustainable design guidelines, legislative changes, and collaboration with other commissions. Key areas of focus for the work plan included revising the sustainability planning guidelines, developing sustainable design guidelines, considering legislative changes to the act, and collaborating with the Environmental Justice Council and the Climate Action Commission. Revising the guidelines would involve focusing on programmatic aspects and providing more specific direction to agencies. Developing sustainable design guidelines would involve creating guidelines that reflect "heroic pragmatism." Legislative changes would involve updating the act to include climate and resiliency.

The discussion elaborated on the collaboration with other commissions and agencies, highlighting the Environmental Justice Council and potential partnerships with agencies like Business Oregon and ODOT. Collaboration with the Environmental Justice Council would involve discussing key indicators for their mapping tool. There was potential for joint work sessions or participation by board members in these collaborations. Business Oregon and ODOT were agencies where partnerships could be beneficial. ODOT's Climate Office was seen as a potential ally in advancing climate goals.

Finally, the board discussed potential collaboration with the Governor's office on housing needs and shared information about the Department of Energy's report on state agency energy use and the need for a unified approach to decarbonization. The board could potentially collaborate with the Governor's office on housing needs. Housing intersects with resilience, pollution, and energy systems.

#### **Break 12:15-12:30pm**

#### **Working lunch: WOU sustainability projects and programs**

**Shaun Huston, Department Head, Department of Sustainability, Western Oregon University**

**12:30 – 1:00 pm**

Sean Houston, a geographer and professor in the Department of Sustainability at Western Oregon University, introduced himself as the department head, clarifying the distinction between Western Oregon and Western Washington. The sustainability program at Western Oregon was launched in 2018, encouraged by President Rex Fuller. The program originated within the geography department, reflecting the natural connection between geography and sustainability, particularly in human-environment interactions. Challenges exist due to the university's siloed structure, as ideally, it should be interdisciplinary. However, the program incorporates courses from various departments, including biology, political science, philosophy, and communication studies.

The geography program was cut, including the loss of an urban geographer, which impacted sustainability studies. In response, the sustainability program was revamped in 2020-2021, and a new program was launched. A key change was the introduction of a dedicated sustainability course prefix, making the program more visible to students. The program has a small number of majors, but a larger number of minors. Sustainability is a popular field for general education requirements, indicating student interest. Students are often drawn to sustainability due to their existing concerns about climate change and environmental issues. An initial program structure with separate environment and business concentrations was modified due to a lack of student interest in the business concentration.

Despite the removal of the business concentration, many business students still take sustainability courses as minors or electives. Connections between sustainability and other fields, such as earth environmental science and mathematics, are evident. A math major is actively minoring in sustainability, looking to combine the fields. The program offers opportunities for students to gain practical experience through practicums and internships. Many students are particularly interested in agriculture and watershed management. The university's Career Development office organized a sustainability jobs tour, reflecting student interest in career opportunities.

There is no formal statewide sustainability education consortium. Oregon State University was the first to offer a sustainability major, but it's structured as a second major. Western Oregon's program is unique in its dedicated sustainability course offerings, rather than relying solely on courses from other departments. Southern Oregon University has also started a sustainability major. Central Oregon Community College is developing sustainability courses. Community colleges, such as Columbia Gorge Community College, offer practical, technical programs related to sustainability. Western Oregon collaborates with community colleges on projects like energy audits. The university also works with agencies and the University of Oregon on sustainable landscape practices and is developing a project to create sustainable landscape practices. Graduates pursue careers in natural resource agencies and city planning departments or integrate sustainability into their personal and professional lives. The program aims to provide students with a sustainability lens that they can apply in any field, with the goal of providing students with the ability to see the world through a sustainable perspective. A more structured job placement program could potentially attract more majors. Collaboration with corporations and agencies is needed to understand their needs and create opportunities. Engaging students in state agencies and commissions is seen as beneficial, and there is a desire to increase student engagement in state agencies. The program contributes to general education but faces challenges in justifying its value compared to major-focused programs. High course enrollment provides some protection against potential cuts; however, administration tends to value major numbers, over general education course numbers.

Opportunities exist for students to engage in projects with agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture's climate-smart agriculture program. Students show significant interest in agriculture and sustainable food systems. Students are very interested in the topics of sustainable agriculture. Students are drawn to sustainable agriculture due to its potential for positive impact and multiple benefits. The field of sustainability can be emotionally challenging, given the ongoing environmental crises. Practical actions, such as supporting sustainable agriculture and adopting sustainable practices, offer students a sense of agency, and the students are very interested in practical solutions that they can take part in. Efforts are underway to expand sustainability education beyond carbon emissions and transportation. Projects involving recycling programs and sustainable landscaping are being explored. The need to challenge conventional practices, such as maintaining large expanses of green grass, is highlighted, and there is a need to challenge the conventional ideas of what is considered normal, regarding landscape maintenance.

Students often begin with a focus on individual consumer choices but learn to think more systemically. The program aims to balance awareness of environmental challenges with a sense of hope and agency. Providing real-world examples and alternative solutions is crucial to prevent nihilism, and the program tries to balance the negative information with real-world examples of positive change. The board explores ways to connect students with agencies and provide them with practical experience. Collaboration should be driven by agency needs and opportunities for meaningful contributions. Engaging students in real-world projects can foster a sense of hope and empowerment, and there is a focus on getting agencies and students to work together on projects. The board discusses facilitating connections between students and agencies, including the Department of Agriculture. Case studies and field trips, such as to "resources" organization, can provide valuable learning experiences. Entrepreneurship is a key aspect of sustainability, and opportunities exist for students to start their own businesses, and there is a focus on connecting students with entrepreneurial opportunities. Business majors are often interested in starting their own sustainable businesses. Combining sustainability with other fields, such as carpentry, can create unique opportunities, and there are many

opportunities to combine sustainability with other fields. The participants express gratitude for the opportunity to meet and discuss sustainability education.

## **State of Oregon/City of Salem collaboration opportunities, ecosystems- Michael Slater, Chair, Salem Planning Commission**

**1-1:30 pm**

Michael was present to discuss the topic of urban streams, specifically a regenerative project. The chair emphasized the need to keep presentations brief.

Michael began by outlining the topics he would cover: the importance of urban streams, property ownerships along Salem streams, and potential actions to help. He clarified that he was not an official representative of the City of Salem but was present on behalf of the Planning Commission.

Michael then discussed the interconnected system of streams, including riparian areas, wetlands, and floodplains. He highlighted the significance of the NOAA biological opinion on salmon habitat, which stipulates that salmon habitat includes the first 170 feet of floodplain from the stream. This was contrasted with Salem's current land use policy of a 50-foot boundary, indicating a potential discrepancy and the need for the state to address this issue.

Salem has 15 streams, with approximately 90 miles in total. Three of these streams—Mill Creek, Shelton Ditch, and two in Northwest, Glen Creek and Gibson Creek—are salmon-bearing. Mill Creek was identified as the most significant salmon-bearing stream. It was noted that salmon sightings, once common, are now rare.

Michael skipped over slides detailing habitat and ecosystem services but informed the group that there are 6 federally threatened species, 6 state-listed species, and 7 state and federally listed plants that utilize the Salem riparian zones. The city recently completed a floodplain species assessment, providing current data on this issue.

The discussion moved to the condition of the streams, which are under a total maximum daily load for various pollutants, including heat and mercury. Other issues include loss of riparian wetlands, altered stream morphology, reduced marine animal stocks, unforced stream frontage, fish passage barriers, invasive species, high winter flow and velocity, and gravel mining operations.

Despite these challenges, the city is prioritizing stormwater storage and movement, increasingly using ecological, nature-based solutions. The city also has a "coexist with beavers" policy.

Michael then focused on the heart of his presentation: the state-owned properties along Mill Creek. He presented a map showing the distribution of these properties, noting that one parcel had recently been sold to a private developer. This sale highlighted the need to proactively address the disposition of such properties to protect riparian areas.

He provided specific examples of state-owned properties, including the motor pool area and former Department of Corrections land, detailing their acreage, stream frontage, and the potential impact of 50-foot and 170-foot buffers. He emphasized the potential for these areas to be used for wetland mitigation or natural areas rather than development.

Michael's primary request was for the state to consider conserving state-owned land up to 170 feet from the stream bank for undeveloped properties to protect salmon populations. He clarified that "undeveloped" generally refers to land without impermeable surfaces.

The next step would be to think long term in terms of restoration. The immediate goal is conservation, followed by restoration efforts, the development of land management plans, and potentially a stakeholder-wide Mill Creek plan. He acknowledged the challenges of dealing with private land ownership but emphasized the importance of protecting state-owned properties.

A discussion ensued regarding the potential for a project to direct agencies to work with the city to enhance their property for riparian function. The idea of incorporating these considerations into space planning and

real estate decisions was raised, particularly concerning poor-performing buildings that could potentially be removed to allow for restoration.

The concept of "managed retreat" was introduced, focusing on prioritizing human safety and maintaining essential state functions in the face of increased flooding due to climate change. The need to consider ecological function in addition to salmon-bearing status was also discussed.

One participant framed the issue as a policy question regarding the state's behavior as both a model and a responder. The idea of using the Salem properties as a pilot project to examine how the state can be a steward of its properties, and the environment was proposed. The potential for collaboration with students on such a project was also suggested.

A discussion then took place about the need for a risk assessment of state properties in the context of flooding, similar to existing assessments for earthquake risk. The disproportionate impact of state-owned land in Salem, particularly concerning heat island effects due to large areas of impermeable surfaces and lack of tree cover, was highlighted.

The group agreed to allow Dave to move forward with exploring this issue, recognizing the need to develop policy around the state's role as a property owner and steward of the environment.

Michael informed the group that he would be presenting to the Salem Planning Commission in April. The chair thanked Michael for his presentation, acknowledging the importance of the local context and the need to bring the issue to the leadership team.

#### **Equity in procurement: DAS Procurement Services-Chris Wilson, Grants, Loans, and Programs Manager 1:30 - 2:00 pm**

Christopher Wilson presented findings from the 2023 State of Oregon disparity study, a 543-page document analyzing spend and availability data to measure inequities in state contracting. The core calculation of "participation divided by availability," where 100 represents parity and scores below 80 indicate "substantial underutilization," revealed significant disparities. Specifically, 34% of people of color and women-owned businesses were deemed available for state contracts, yet only 11% secured them during the five-year study period. Furthermore, less than 3% of the total contract money went to certified businesses, illustrating a stark gap between potential and actual participation. These disparities were pervasive across most work sectors and demographics, with the notable exception of Native American-owned businesses in some areas. This anomaly was attributed to the presence of a few large tribal businesses that significantly influenced the statistical calculations, despite the prevalence of smaller Native-owned businesses not captured within the study's scope.

In response to these findings, the state is launching a small business program, grounded in the disparity study and formalized through House Bill 2337. This initiative will allocate a significant, yet undisclosed, percentage of state spending to small businesses and establish a new small business enterprise certification. This certification aims to broaden support beyond existing certifications for minority, veteran, and women-owned businesses, addressing the needs of a wider range of small businesses, particularly those in rural Oregon. The program's overarching goal is to alleviate disparities within five years. If these disparities persist, the state will implement narrowly tailored race and gender-based protocols. The speaker emphasized the importance of data-driven policy, community engagement, and collaborative efforts to drive meaningful change, stressing the need for cohesive data and transparent metrics to inform policy decisions and monitor progress.

#### **Other Board Business: Wrap-up and Adjourn 2:00- 2:30 pm**

**Sustainability Plan and Approval:**

The meeting addressed the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's (OWEB) resubmitted sustainability plan, which incorporated feedback from previous discussions, particularly regarding programmatic impact. Members reviewed the plan, with positive feedback from Johanna, David, Alan, and Tania. A motion was made and seconded to approve the plan, and it passed unanimously with verbal and digital (thumbs-up) confirmations from attendees.

**Streamlining Operational Reporting and Subgroups:**

Discussion shifted to streamlining operational reporting for agencies, categorizing them into three tiers based on asset ownership and operational footprint. A proposal to send out these tiered reporting guidelines for further review was made. Additionally, the need for a subgroup to address sustainable design and resiliency was identified, and a separate meeting was proposed to discuss this further. David suggested creating a recurring work block to allow board members time for reading and reviewing materials, and to facilitate smaller, focused meetings for specific topics like legislation and building design.

**Meeting Logistics and Calendar Management:**

The group discussed the challenges of scheduling and workload, particularly with quarterly meetings and the need for more frequent engagement. Members agreed to establish a monthly Friday work block, two weeks prior to regular meetings, to provide dedicated time for board work. The possibility of using a SharePoint site to share documents and background materials was raised to improve accessibility. The 2025 meeting dates were reviewed, with a note that the June meeting would proceed in Newport, and the potential for a vice-chair position was discussed, with the Secretary of State being considered.

**Action Items and Future Considerations:**

The group agreed to: (1) distribute the tiered reporting guidelines for agency sustainability; (2) establish a recurring monthly Friday work block for board members; (3) investigate the feasibility of using a SharePoint site for document sharing; (4) continue planning for the June 2025 meeting in Newport; and (5) further discuss the vice-chair position after a meeting with the Secretary of State. The meeting concluded with a reminder to distribute the meeting calendar.

**Action Items:**

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