Oregon
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TO: Land Conservation and Development Commission

FROM: Jim Rue, Director
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SUBJECT: **Agenda Item 12, November 18-19, 2021, LCDC Meeting**

RECOVERY PLANNING AFTER THE 2020 WILDFIRES

I. AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

Purpose. Provide information to the Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC or commission) on the recovery planning that has occurred and is underway as a result of the 2020 Labor Day Fires.

Objective. Commissioners are aware of the recovery planning and the role of Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD or department) regional representatives in each local community planning and capacity building effort.

For further information about this report, please contact Matt Crall, Planning Services Division Manager, at 503-798-6419 or matt.crall@dlcd.oregon.gov.

II. BACKGROUND

The 2020 Labor Day fires were extremely destructive in Oregon communities. More than 4,000 homes were destroyed, 2,500 in Southern Oregon alone.

According to Oregon State University's After the Fire storymap project, of over 30 active fires, five of these fires were over 100,000 acres each, and in total, over a million acres burned in Oregon. Half a million Oregonians were under a Level 1, 2 or 4 evacuation notice, and 40,000 of those had to leave their homes.

In Oregon's emergency response system, DLCD is the coordinating agency for State Recovery Function 1: Community Planning and Capacity Building. The goal for that recovery function is that **Oregon communities recovering from destructive wildfires**

have the capacity to envision a more healthy, equitable, resilient, and prosperous future, and the capacity to create a strategic rebuilding plan that achieves their vision.

DLCD regional representatives are working closely with communities on rebuilding, including coordination with regional solutions teams, other state agencies, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), local governments, non-profits, and other service providers.

The fires affected a range of communities from urban communities to rural:

Cities and unincorporated areas within the urban growth boundary

A. Almeda and south Obenchain fires, Jackson County

Cities and rural areas

B. Beachie Creek and Lionshead Fires, Santiam Canyon

Unincorporated rural communities and rural areas

C. Holiday Farm Fire, Lane County
D. Echo Mountain Fire, Lincoln County
E. Archie Creek Fire, Douglas County

Given the amount of rebuilding and permitting needed, the Oregon Legislature provided $100,000 to DLCD to assist communities with permitting and planning assistance. The bill that carried these funds was HB 5042. These funds were intended to be spent within three months, by the end of the biennium. Jackson County (including the communities of Talent and Phoenix) received $54,500 through consultant planning assistance, the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments received $27,300 for planning assistance for the fire affected communities in the Santiam Canyon, Lincoln County received $12,800 and Lane County received $10,800.

A. ALMEDA AND SOUTH OBENCHAIN FIRES, JACKSON COUNTY

The Almeda Fire began in northern Ashland and moved north up the Highway 99 and Bear Creek corridor through the cities of Talent and Phoenix, as well as unincorporated Jackson County. The fire burned approximately 3,000 acres. The South Obenchain fire burned northeast of the City of Eagle Point in a mixture of farm and open space land. It burned roughly 33,000 acres.

Altogether, the fires destroyed around 2,500 residential properties, including around 1,600 manufactured homes in 18 mobile home parks and approximately 180 commercial properties. The fires also caused significant damage to urban infrastructure and equipment. Approximately 6,500 people were displaced.

Southern Oregon, like much of Oregon, suffered from a substantial lack of housing affordable to local residents prior to the fires. This affordability problem has now been

exacerbated. A significant portion of the destroyed housing, especially manufactured housing, was located in the Bear Creek floodplain or floodway. This has impacted redevelopment options and, potentially, the affordability of replacement housing.

Considerable rebuilding has occurred and is continuing. Building permits have been issued for nearly 25% of the destroyed residences. That number should increase once more of the manufactured home parks get their infrastructure repaired and sites prepped. Additionally, Jackson County recently opened a Wildfire Resiliency Center which will provide expedited plan review and permits for fire-affected properties that are in the unincorporated areas of the county.

However, there are still many residents who haven't found permanent housing: 110 households are currently residing in FEMA Direct Housing and approximately 430 people are still being sheltered in hotels. Many of those in hotels are slated to transition into long-term apartments which are being made available through the conversion of four hotels in the Medford area by a private company.

There has been a substantial amount of assistance provided to these communities regarding interim and permanent housing and the region is beginning to see some of these projects come to fruition. For instance, the Talent Urban Renewal "Gateway" site in the City of Talent recently held a groundbreaking for 53 trailers that will be used to house displaced families from the Phoenix-Talent School District. That project included considerable support from the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department (OHCS). Their plan involves a transition to a more permanent site design which was developed through a previous grant from the Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) Program.

DLCD staff provided direct technical support to these jurisdictions since the fire on a variety of code related issues and amendments. DLCD also provided approximately $55,000 of HB 5042 funds for staff capacity to Jackson County, and the cities of Phoenix and Talent last biennium. With those funds, DLCD hired a consultant to provide real-time permit processing support. This included basic functions such as floodplain review and responding to planning counter inquiries.

Business Oregon has also funded additional staff capacity in these jurisdictions using $2 million that the legislature appropriated for the Municipal Wildfire Assistance Program (MWAP) last biennium and this biennium.

Shortly after the Almeda fire, DLCD staff engaged the three affected jurisdictions and developed a framework for a new TGM grant. The basic concept was to reimagine and re-envision the Highway 99 and Bear Creek corridor since much of the corridor was destroyed and there is now a substantial amount of vacant land.

Prior to the Almeda Fire, development of land adjacent to the Highway 99 corridor consisted of a mix of uses including commercial, industrial, and low- to high-density

residential. However, the development was largely inefficient, automobile-oriented, and lacked identity and place-making elements. Furthermore, significant portions of Highway 99 lack adequate facilities and are unsafe and uncomfortable for people traveling on foot or by bike, including many traditionally underserved residents living near the highway throughout this corridor.

Over the course of the past year, the TGM project scope was refined, and a consultant was recently selected. Work will likely begin early next year. The intended outcome of the process is to create a plan and development code language for redeveloping the land adjacent to the transportation corridor in a manner that supports multi-modal transportation, with a particular emphasis on walking and biking, and multi-use hubs or nodes that improve destination accessibility and reduce the need for motor vehicle travel.

One particularly innovative component of that grant is that DLCD has received a commitment from OHCS to provide funding to compensate people who serve as advisory members for the project. The hope is that this hourly compensation will help increase involvement from people in the community who are traditionally underserved and are typically underrepresented in planning processes. This is especially important due to the disproportionate impacts by the fires to this community.

This project will dovetail nicely with a project Jackson County is conducting to develop a more sustainable governance and management model for the Bear Creek Greenway- a 20-mile, paved, multi-use trail that links the cities of Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, Medford, and Central Point.

The Oregon Chapter of the American Planning Association's (OAPA) Community Assistance Planning Program also assisted by preparing an initial assessment and recovery plan for the City of Talent. Lastly, DLCD funded a small Technical Assistance grant for the Sustainable Cities Institute at the University of Oregon to develop and conduct a citizen involvement survey for the City of Talent. The survey covers ten citizen involvement topics and four community planning topics. Collectively, these provides valuable guidance on how the city can improve community engagement and planning.

There is a lot to learn from an urban fire such as the Almeda. Many of the lessons learned are only tangentially related to land use and planning; however, they do serve to illustrate the complexity of preparing for natural hazards.

Even though the fire was largely an urban fire, it spread between communities through a wildfire-urban interface and then through a riparian corridor which was largely overgrown with flammable materials. Creating more standards for these areas could have a significant affect in reducing the potential for future fires. It was also evident that irrigated farmland significantly reduced the spread of the fire.

This illustrates a largely overlooked aspect of preserving land for farming on the periphery of communities. Yet, the reduced reliability of irrigation water in many parts of the state due to climactic forces may impair this element unless more is done to ensure availability of water for irrigation.

Another significant issue was that the municipal water system within the cities of Talent and Phoenix lost pressure during the fire. This severely hampered the ability to fight the fire. A resilient infrastructure system would have alleviated this problem.

B. BEACHIE CREEK AND LIONSHEAD FIRES, SANTIAM CANYON

The complex of fires that raced down the Santiam Canyon on Labor Day 2020 burned almost 400,000 acres. The Beachie Creek Fire (193,565 acres) was first detected August 16, 2020, in the Opal Creek Wilderness. Labor Day winds blowing 50-75 miles per hour fanned the flames and the fire grew from 500 acres to over 130,000 acres overnight. That same night, many new fires erupted along the Santiam Canyon in the vicinity of downed power lines, including a fire at the Beachie Creek Fire Incident Command Post in Gates that forced the incident management team to evacuate. The Lionshead Fire (204,587 acres) started in the Mount Jefferson Wilderness and burned west to merge with the Beachie Creek Fire.

The Santiam Canyon is a mix of small cities, unincorporated communities, and off-grid homesteads and camps following the North Santiam River, with Marion County occupying the north slopes and Linn County the south. The incorporated cities within the burn scar from west to east are Lyons, Mill City, Gates, Detroit, and Idanha. Unincorporated communities damaged include Mehama, Elkhorn, and Brietenbush.

The most tragic impact was the death of four people. Approximately 20 people are currently living in hotels. Another eleven families are in direct housing provided by FEMA. It is unknown how many more are staying with relatives or friends, often couch-surfing. When these arrangements are no longer sustainable, people end up back in hotels or FEMA housing.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency estimates that over 900 properties have been assessed for hazardous waste. The state has contracted to cleared hazardous trees and remove ash and debris. Currently about 85.6% properties (582 out of 680) have been completed, and 59,349 tons of ash and debris have been removed in the Beachie Creek Fire and Lionshead Fire areas.

The Oregon Office of Emergency Management estimates that 937 structures were destroyed or substantially damaged in Marion and Linn Counties. Of these, 724 homes need to be replaced or repaired: 268 in Detroit, 88 in Gates, 31 in Mill City, 279 in unincorporated Marion County and 59 in unincorporated Linn County. As of October 7, 287 dwelling permits had been issued, 40% of the estimated need. Out of 694 septic systems needing replacement or repair, 371 had been issued, 53% of estimated need.

Detroit is suffering the greatest lag in permitting, with just 28% of dwelling permits and 42% of septic permits issued.

Barriers to rebuilding in Detroit and Gates can be tied to many factors, with the most salient being:

1. The cities lack local capacity to handle permitting. The cities had only one recorder as staff each. The cities contract with the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments (MWVCOG) and Marion County for planning and permitting. However, staff themselves were displaced by the fires and there was no money in place to fund the massive number of permits and the tax base was decimated.

2. The cities were without running water for months.

3. Wastewater infrastructure was already inadequate before the fires. Rebuilding septic systems to code requires additional land or far more expensive systems.

4. Many of the burned homes in both cities are located in regulated flood zones requiring floodplain permits and certificates of elevation to document that the rebuilt home is above the base flood elevation.

5. The cities' zoning and development codes were inadequate for the permitting requirements for flood zones.

Several planning projects are underway, having originated through discussions and partnering via weekly meetings with FEMA's and the State Recovery Function #1's Community Planning and Capacity Building (CPCB) teams and the Mid-Willamette Valley Regional Solutions Team (RST) before Marion County and the communities were able to move beyond simply responding to the disaster.

1. The Oregon Chapter of the American Planning Association (OAPA) provided pro bono planning through their Community Assistance Planning Program working with MWVCOG and Marion County.

2. Santiam Canyon Economic Analysis, led by ECONorthwest, with OAPA, MWVCOG, RST, Marion County.

3. Gates and Detroit Community Visioning and Strategic Planning, led by Better City.

4. Floodplain mapping and LOMAs, surveyor coordinated by MWVCOG for Detroit and Gates, funded by DLCD.

5. RARE participants: Main Street Planning and updating design standards with MWVCOG for Detroit and Gates.

DLCD staff have been able to respond to planning and rebuilding needs as they arise by participating in the RST's Santiam Canyon Wildfire Recovery and the SRF#1 coordinating meetings with FEMA. DLCD coordinated funding and staff technical assistance to overcome barriers to rebuilding in Gates and Detroit due to floodplain issues. DLCD staff assisted cities statewide by mapping substantially damaged structures within the floodplain and floodway so that cities and counties could track rebuilding on these properties as required by FEMA.

Lessons learned in the recovery in the Santiam Canyon include:

1. A community cannot "vision" while still responding to immediate needs like shelter and response can take an entire year or more. Planning groups were offering non-monetary assistance for long-range planning long before communities were ready to think about it. All requests were for money to help rebuild homes, a community center, and infrastructure.

2. Any inadequacies a community has before a disaster will be magnified after the disaster. Recovery is greatly hindered by: lack of staff capacity and immediately available funding; inadequate infrastructure especially water and wastewater disposal; and outdated development codes.

3. Communication needs to be tightly connected, from the individual survivor to the local philanthropic group, to the community staff, to the state and federal partners. Example, interim housing projects that begin locally end up delayed or canceled due to state wastewater regulations that would have been caught earlier with tighter communication.

4. Need to streamline the process of transferring funding to communities for immediate problem-solving.

C. HOLIDAY FARM FIRE, LANE COUNTY

The Holiday Farm wildfire burned 173,395 acres in the McKenzie River valley while destroying 464 dwellings and 17 commercial buildings. Lane County has issued 166 replacement dwelling building permits and has 27 additional residential building permit applications currently under plan review. 80% of these permits represent primary residences.

Lane County has issued 90 permits for temporary placement of RVs in the river valley. Local property owners have sold 80 parcels in the burn area since the fire.

Approximately 100 people displaced by the wildfire remain in hotels in the Eugene-Springfield area. Disaster case workers from Lane County, the State of Oregon, and

Catholic Charities of Oregon provide wrap-around health and human services for these fire victims. Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) and the Lane County Housing Authority (Homes for Good) continue to work on permanent housing solutions for these displaced residents.

Department staff are engaged in three important long-range planning projects in the McKenzie River valley:

1. Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) Program-sponsored Blue River Complete Community Plan project.

2. Oregon Solutions' McKenzie Rebuilds project.

3. Willamette Partnership's Letter of Interest to the federal Environmental Protection Agency investigating Wastewater Solutions for Rural Riverside Communities.

The wildfire highlighted the need to improve communication and understanding on Oregon's complex system of land use laws and zoning standards applicable to rural lands and unincorporated areas. The commission's ability to do quick rulemaking to allow temporary homes for displaced residents aided tremendously in local and regional recovery and rebuilding efforts.

D. ECHO MOUNTAIN FIRE, LINCOLN COUNTY

The Echo Mountain Fire started the evening of September 7, 2020, burning a total of 2,552 acres, destroying nearly 300 homes, and upending the lives of nearly 1,200 people in and around the unincorporated community of Otis. Many of the fire-impacted individuals work in and around Lincoln City. Lincoln City was the initial landing place for people fleeing the fires and quickly became the staging area for fire refugees and responders, until the entire town of Lincoln City had to be evacuated and then response efforts moved south to Newport, Oregon. The Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians (CTSI) provided initial staging areas until those had to be evacuated and later, offered the use of land that is being used for the FEMA direct housing mission. Lincoln County, the City of Lincoln City and CTSI continue to be a part of the recovery efforts.

There are currently 23 families in the FEMA direct housing mission with 53 people total, which is a temporary housing solution. There are approximately 50 families left in hotels, all of them at The Haven (a privately owned hotel in Lincoln City) and 75 families have returned home to some type of structure in Otis. Approximately 25 of those families are back on their properties, but are living in something temporary, such as a trailer. The remaining families may be renting, staying with friends and family, or camping. Approximately 30 households have left the area. The county has not seen the mass exodus that was experienced in other fire-impacted areas. Of the 300 affected households, between formative efforts like those of the Red Cross and FEMA, and more

community-based efforts, like local churches, 290 households had reached out to at least one support agency.

The Lincoln County Planning Department has been overwhelmed in planning efforts both due to a housing boom on the coast and with wildfire recovery efforts. While building permits for wildfire-destroyed homes peaked in February 2021, the planning department continues to see new permits filed every week. Fee waivers, first issued by the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners and later passed by the state legislature, have assisted survivors by waiving many fees. Additionally, Lincoln County Planning has used DLCD HB 5042 wildfire assistance funding to hire an extra permit technician, which has allowed them to track and process wildfire rebuilds in a faster manner. Other aids to rebuilding have been a septic and well water program that the county stood up using dollars from the state. A simple online application allows survivors to apply for assistance for inspections, repairs, and full replacement of septic and well water systems, which allows them to move forward in the permitting process. Initial monies for this program are running out but additional funding is expected.

Repair of roads damaged in the recovery process remains a critical issue for recovery. These are mostly unpaved, rural residential roads that are either maintained by a small road district or are "public access roads" that are maintained by the public without any tax funding base. While roads held up in the actual fire, the recovery process has not only created surface issues on the road, but also created underlaying problems with several failing culverts that have been crushed by the continuous heavy equipment needed for recovery that these roads simply were not built to handle. Several attempts at state and federal funding have been made by Lincoln County and all of them have been denied to date.

Housing is also a major challenge to recovery as Lincoln County was already in an affordable housing crisis. Many wildfire survivors were renters. Several of the properties they rented have since been sold and they will not be returning to those properties. Finding affordable housing in the community is a major challenge. ODHS has issued credits to Lincoln County for a fixed-income wildfire survivor housing complex to be built in North Lincoln County. This will help, but will not solve, all of the housing problems for survivors.

DLCD provided HB 5042 funding in May 2021 to assist the Lincoln County Department of Community Development with added capacity to process the necessary permits to support the rebuilding efforts. DLCD also actively participated in the Echo Mountain Fire Coordination Taskforce (led by the Governor’s Office through Regional Solutions) and continues to engage in the State Recovery Function #1: Community Planning and Capacity Building team meetings.

There are many, and continue to be more, lessons learned from these wildfires:

1. Engaging state agencies such as DLCD along with other regulatory agencies early and often post-disaster is critical. Opening those lines of communication is important as the community moves beyond the actual event and into recovery and rebuilding particularly given the complexity of Oregon land use. This could help mitigate the uncertainty and confusion in the recovery process. This is even more important in areas that are unincorporated.

2. The ability to quickly do temporary rulemaking as DLCD did following the wildfire is very important to allow for appropriate flexibility after a disaster event. The amount of relief this provides survivors at a time when it's most needed is critical.

3. It was not clear, early on, whether local governments, including school districts, had the authority to waive fees.

4. The process of recovery is a process informed by traditional and antiquated definitions of family. It is a process designed to reinforce Anglo-Saxon norms at the expense of the actual lived experiences of Americans as they exist in the 21st century. These processes can:

    a. Leave out extended families, which disproportionately leaves out people of color and limited economic means.
    b. Reinforce the value of property over the value of actually being alive, thus leaving out people of limited economic means.
    c. Be misogynistic, one which may require women seek approval for shelter from their abuser.
    d. If you are poor and without agency ensures that you will stay that way unless someone with agency authorizes it.
    e. Leave out some of the most in need by only helping people that FEMA deems worthy.

5. The process does not recognize that many individuals and communities may not feel comfortable engaging with government and providing information to the government. This is especially true for migrant and immigrant populations.

6. Existing challenges around infrastructure such as roads and housing were exacerbated. Lincoln City had never had to evacuate on a large scale before and this caused many issues. Adjoining communities like Newport had never had to receive an entire community before, putting pressures on both communities.

7. Overcoming the disbelief that the coast experienced a wildfire is challenging and educating people that it may not be an anomaly is still a challenge.

8. Lincoln City was lacking some capability with equity and inclusion, which reinforced the need to a better job of planning for any and all types of events.

9. Having proactive partnerships and agreements in place between cities, the County, the CTSI, school district and community-based groups to address catastrophic events is important.
10. The Regional Solutions Team (RST) can play a significant role in bringing the necessary state agencies to the table.

11. Establishing a long-term recovery group, like other communities have, prior to the disaster would have facilitated the recovery effort.

12. There is a need for more diverse individuals trained and prepared for response during an actual emergency including translators, first responders, call center volunteers, policy group volunteers and media sources. This would ensure that diverse individuals have the information they need in real time without delays in translation services. Additionally diverse responders can address barriers populations may have beyond language.

E. ARCHIE CREEK FIRE, DOUGLAS COUNTY

The Archie Creek fired burned northeast of the City of Roseburg on Highway 138, near the community of Glide. Approximately 130,000 acres of mostly forestland burned. The fire impacted approximately 100,000 residents due to evacuation orders, fire, or smoke damage. The entire community of Glide was evacuated along with the Rock Creek area, in northeast Douglas County. The Oregon Department of Transportation closed 66 miles of Highway 138 from Glide to where it merges with Highway 230.

Altogether 138 structures were destroyed by the fire, including 109 residences. Five people are still being sheltered in hotels. At this point there have been 23 permits issued for replacement dwellings.

FEMA's Community Planning and Capacity Building arm has been assisting with the planning needs of Glide Revitalization, a group that formed in response to the fire. Additional planning work underway consists of a Community Needs Analysis conducted by University of Oregon's Partnership for Disaster Resilience and Headwaters Economics' Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire program.

DLCD will be working with Douglas County next year to update their natural hazards mitigation plan. Additionally, Douglas County is in the process of completing an update of their community wildfire protection plan.

Business Oregon has supplied the county with financial resources through MWAP to assist with staff and planning capacity. This may allow some natural hazard planning work in addition to what will be conducted by DLCD.

F. OSU'S AFTER THE FIRE STORYMAP AND INTERIM HOUSING GEOFINDER PROJECTS

Through problem-solving discussions at SRF 1 meetings, the Governor's Wildfire Recovery Ombudsman, Michael Morter, identified the need for a common mapping platform containing data layers that could be used simultaneously by federal, state, local, and philanthropic partners to help identify properties for interim housing. The state agencies did not have capacity to create what was needed. Meanwhile, Oregon State University Extension's Fire Program had developed a storymap, called "After the Fire," to quickly assist victims of the wildfire. OSU's storymap is a collection of interactive webmaps, tools for assessing damage, images and descriptions of the fires, and links to recovery resources. DLCD approached OSU to build on its existing storymap and rapidly create a webmap that could be used for interim housing suitability analysis. With funding from OEM, coordination by DLCD staff, and assistance from an OHCS consultant, OSU created the Interim Housing Geofinder. OSU and DLCD staff are in the process of publicizing the webmap and training users.

III. RECOMMENDED ACTION/CONCLUSION

We appreciate commissioners' ongoing support, interest and any guidance commissioners would like to offer with respects to community planning and capacity building. Fire rebuilding is a long-term process – taking years. This is a complementary agenda item and staff report to the Senate Bill 762 study DLCD staff are leading. That proactive mitigation discussion is included under a separate agenda item.

IV. ATTACHMENTS

A. WILDFIRE RECOVERY UPDATE 10-18-21, OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT