



# Public Open Houses Summary

November 2014

## **Prepared for**

Multnomah County

## **Prepared by**

JLA Public Involvement

## OVERVIEW

Multnomah County held two public open house meetings and an online open house in November 2014 for the Multnomah County Comprehensive Plan Update process. The purpose of these events was to:

- Share information about the Comprehensive Plan update process with the public.
- Solicit input on major issues facing the county that need to be addressed in the Plan update.

In total, 168 people signed in at the two public open house events (52 at the West open house, and 116 at the East open house). There were also 100 unique visitors to the online open house.

## PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE MEETING DETAILS

Public open houses were held on the east and west side of the County:

- November 5, 2014, 5:00-7:30 p.m.  
East County Open House  
Columbia Grange Hall  
37493 Grange Hall Rd, Corbett, OR
- November 6, 2014, 5:30-8:00 p.m.  
West County Open House  
Skyline Elementary School Gymnasium  
11536 NW Skyline Blvd, Portland, OR



### Open House Format

The open house events were held in an informal, drop-in style with various stations that provided project information. Attendees were asked to sign in at the welcome area and received project handouts and a comment form. Each station included display boards and ways to provide comments.

The event included the following information stations:

1. **Introduction and Background** – This station included a project summary, study area map, and project schedule; and explained how the Comprehensive Plan is related to other County plans and policies. It also included some information from the Baseline Report, including demographic, land use and zoning information.
2. **Comprehensive Plan Topic Areas** – Participants were able to learn about how the Comprehensive Plan addresses seven topic areas: land use; transportation; public facilities; farm, forest and mineral resources; environmental quality; natural hazards; and rural economy.

The station included a Comment Wall where attendees were invited to post their comments, concerns, and desires for each of the seven topic area. A total of 51 comments were posted on the Comment Wall at the two open houses.

- 3. Next Steps and Get Involved** – This station included information about how decisions will be made and ways to comment and stay informed. It also gave information about the Community Advisory Committee (CAC). Participants were invited to submit applications to serve on the CAC.



Staff people were available to interact with participants and answer questions.

### Comment Form

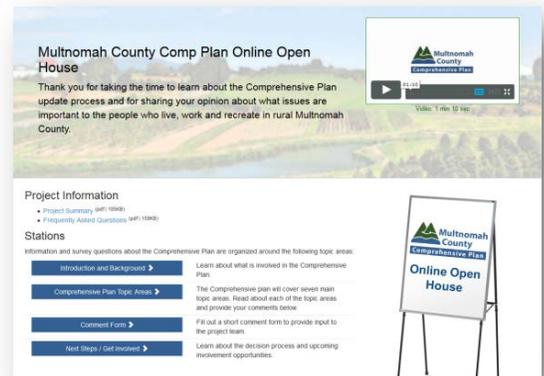
Participants were invited to complete a comment form at the open house. The comment form asked for input on people’s values and long-term visions for the County, as well as land use and transportation issues that should be addressed. A total of 49 comment forms were submitted during the two open house meetings.

## ONLINE OPEN HOUSE

In addition to the public open house meeting, the project team hosted an online open house to allow people to learn about the project and provide their comments online at their convenience. The online open house included an introductory video and a project background video to acquaint participants with the project.

The online open house used the same stations and display board language as the public open house meetings, and invited members to answer comment form questions through an online survey format. In addition, there was a virtual comment wall that allowed participants to share comments with one another about the seven Comprehensive Plan topic areas.

The online open house was available from November 5 to 19, 2014 and had 100 members of the public participate. 34 comment forms were received through the online open house, as well as 18 comments on the Comment Wall.



## NOTIFICATION

The following forms of notification were used to invite people to the open house events:

- **Postcard Mailing:** A postcard was sent to 5,384 property owners in the rural parts of Multnomah County.
- **Email Announcements:** Several email announcements were sent to members of the interested parties email list, as well as to Neighborhood Associations (Skyline Ridge Neighbors, Forest Park Neighborhood Association, Sauvie Island Community Association, and Northeast Multnomah County Community Organization).
- **Posters:** Posters were hung at fifteen locations across Multnomah County.
- **Social Media:** Multnomah County posted tweets and Facebook posts through the official Multnomah County social media channels to encourage people to come to the open house meetings and participate in the online open house event.
- **Press Release:** A press release was sent to various media outlets and posted on the Multnomah County website homepage.

## PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

Members of the public were invited to submit comments through comment forms, the online open house, a comment wall, and phone and email. This document summarizes all comments received, including:

Source	Number of comments
Comment Forms	83 <i>(49 from open houses, 34 from online open house)</i>
Comment Wall – comments on the seven Comp Plan topic areas	69 <i>(East open house: 29 comments, West open house: 22 comments, Online open house: 18 comments)</i>
General web form	4
Phone Calls	1
Open House Flip Chart Comments	6
Email to project team	1

The following is a summary of comments from these sources. An appendix of all comments submitted is also available.

## COMMENT WALL COMMENTS SUMMARY

At the open houses and online open house, participants were invited to post comments about their visions, concerns, and desires for **seven topic areas** that are addressed in the Comprehensive Plan. Their comments included:

### 1) Land Use *(23 comments)*

Many people said that it is important to **preserve the rural character** of rural Multnomah County, and that efforts should be made to **simplify or speed up the permitting process**. Regarding permits, people felt that it costs too much to apply for some simple permits and that waiting for a permit approval can take many months.

Some people also noted that they prefer maintaining **single family detached home** zoning, though some also would like more **housing options**, such as the ability to build an ADU on one's property.

## 2) Transportation (28 comments)

Many of the comments around transportation focused on the **conflict between drivers and bicyclists**. People felt that bicyclists do not follow the rules of the road, and some suggested that cyclists help pay for road improvements through special fees or licenses. A minority advocated for **increased bike lanes** to improve cycling safety.

Another area of concern was **speed enforcement and pedestrian safety**. People felt that speed limits are too high (particularly on Cornelius Pass Rd and other Westside roads). Some also noted that **parking in the Gorge Area** is a problem; visitor parking is inadequate and leads to pedestrians walking on the highway—a dangerous situation.

A couple of people advocated for **increased transit service** to the East side.



## 3) Public Facilities (4 comments)

Few comments were made about public facilities. Individuals made comments about public restrooms, water decontamination as a condition of development, and greater protection of service districts.

## 4) Farm and Forest (2 comments)

Few comments were made about farm and forest. One person noted that land use law and tax systems should support small businesses that meet agricultural and environmental goals.

## 5) Environment (8 comments)

Many comments in this topic area noted that there is **inadequate weed control** in rural areas. A couple of people desired greater protection of wildlife, and a couple also supported greater preservation of historic buildings.

## 6) Natural Hazards Concerns (7 comments)

A couple of people supported more limitations on building in earthquake and landslide hazard areas, although one person supported less restriction. A couple of people supported more efforts to teach rural homeowners what to do in case of disaster—so that they can mobilize and respond themselves.

## 7) Rural Economy (8 comments)

Most of the comments about rural economy supported efforts to **allow more small, locally-owned businesses**, including working from home. Having services nearby would allow residents to live and work within their own community, without having to commute to work or to get services. A few also supported more local businesses to serve tourists.

## COMMENT FORM QUESTIONS

The comment form asked participants questions about their values and visions for rural Multnomah County, as well as specific land use and transportation issues that should be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan update process. This section summarizes the key themes from the comment forms.

### 1) What do you value most about your community? (62 comments)

Key themes:

- **Rural character and proximity to urban city:** Overwhelmingly, people most valued the rural character of rural Multnomah County—and in particular the proximity of the rural area to the urban city. They appreciated accessibility to nature while still being close to downtown, and hope that the Comprehensive Plan enhances collaboration and cooperation between rural and urban County. They like the lack of urban housing developments and minimal commercial activities. A couple of people also appreciate the limited urban sprawl that protects the rural/natural character.
- **Good neighbors and community:** Many people value their neighbors and sense of community in rural Multnomah County. They also noted their community's dedication to sustainability and protecting nature, particularly in East County.
- **Nature and wildlife:** Many people appreciate the protection of wildlife habitat, forest and natural areas in rural County.
- **Sense of solitude:** Several people value the sense of solitude, peace and quiet that comes with living in rural areas. They want to ensure that their community continues to be low-density.
- **Natural beauty:** Several people appreciate the natural beauty that surrounds their home and community.

### 2) If Multnomah County successfully plans for the future, how will the community change in 20 years? What would stay the same? (69 comments)

Key themes:

- **Thriving economy:** People defined a successful future as one that has a thriving agricultural economy, particularly for small farms. Residents want to be able to make a living off of their land, and would like to see increased opportunities for different types of small farming. Many also would like relaxed restrictions on creating small businesses

like farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture, and Bed and Breakfasts, as well as work from home opportunities.

- **Managed growth and limited density:** Many people noted that there needs to be a careful balance between allowing more growth and protecting important farm, forest and environmental resources. They would like to see limited density in rural Multnomah County and good protection of the urban growth boundary, as well as ensuring that property lots are not subdivided. These comments had the overarching goal of seeking to maintain the rural character of rural Multnomah County. As growth continues, it is important to ensure clean air and water, and maintenance of roads and infrastructure.
- **Improved habitat and access to open space:** Participants said that access to open space is important, and should be maintained or even increased. They want to ensure good opportunities to access nature via walking, bicycling and driving. They also would like to see more restoration and improvement of wildlife habitat, including efforts to support wildlife movements, particularly on the West side.
- **Improved housing options:** Many want to see an increase in housing options, including the ability to put ADUs or second family homes on large plots of land. Several also noted the lack of affordable housing options that needs to be remedied.

In addition to these overarching key themes, a few people wanted to make sure that in 20 years, residents still have relative freedom to use their property as they would like, without many restrictions. Some also commented on a desire for better cycling infrastructure.

### 3) What transportation issues need to be addressed to achieve your vision for the County's future? (62 comments)

Key themes:

- **Address traffic and growth issues *without* widening/building more roads:** Many people recognized the growing traffic issues caused by population growth, but would like to see this addressed without substantially increasing the number and width of roads. Instead, they would like to see smarter ways to improve traffic flow and more incentives and infrastructure for walking and biking. Some also noted they would like to see more public transportation alternatives into rural Multnomah County (although a couple said they do not want increased transit, to preserve the rural character).
- **Improve traffic flow on Westside roads:** Many people commented on the need to deal with congestion issues on Westside roads, particularly Cornelius Pass Rd, Germantown Rd, and Skyline Blvd. Several advocated for widening Cornelius Pass Rd, or for other traffic calming measures, including an on-demand traffic signal at Cornelius Pass Rd/Skyline Blvd. A couple said that Westside roads should include safer wildlife crossings.

- **Better bicycling infrastructure:** Many people wanted to see more bicycling infrastructure in general. Several advocated for a bike path on Skyline for safety reasons. A few people wanted a bike path on the Scenic Highway or other Westside roads. On the other hand, a couple of people wanted to see more efforts to get cyclists off the road or require cyclists to follow the rules of the road.
- **Maintain roads:** Several people wanted to see better road maintenance, in general.

In addition to these key themes, a few people made the following comments:

- Advocating for widening roads in general.
- Increasing trails and multi-use paths.
- Lower posted speeds on the Scenic Highway throughout the Gorge, for safety of all modes.

#### 4) What land use issues need to be addressed to achieve your vision for the County's future? (59 comments)

- **Protect farm and forest land—keep rural Multnomah County rural:** People generally want farm and forest lands protected so that rural Multnomah County remains rural, with protection of natural spaces, farms, and large parcels of land. This in particular means preventing subdivision of large parcels and barring higher density residential development. People also want to make sure that policies are in place to encourage and support farming and protection of wild areas. Many said they want to ensure that the rural reserves are protected from adjoining urban areas, which means maintaining the current Urban Growth Boundary in collaboration with urban jurisdictions. Several noted that adequate buffers need to be kept between rural and urban areas (for example, a good buffer around Forest Park).
- **Simplify the land use permitting process:** Many people want permitting to be simplified and more transparent. They noted that many people make illegal improvements to land because the permitting process is simply too costly and onerous. They would also like to see an online process for applying for a permit. Some noted that the rules often seem arbitrary. Some suggested changes to zoning rules to include more exceptions and special conditions, so that rules are not broadly applied to areas where they serve no purpose. This includes changes to the Columbia Gorge Scenic Act tree screening and outbuilding size requirement. A couple suggested better customer service at the planning desk, as well as a “quick reference guide” that gives landowners concise answers to permitting and zoning questions.
- **Allow more economic opportunities:** Many people would like reduced barriers to make it easier to create small businesses. In particular, they would like to allow more small businesses that serve local residents, so that they don't have to drive to get basic services. A few suggested more opportunities to generate income off land, which would

include Bed and Breakfasts, agri-tourism, and sustainable resource extraction. In general, people wanted economic opportunities to complement the rural environment.

- **More flexibility for landowners:** Several people would like to see greater flexibility with what they can do with their land, as long as those uses do not negatively impact rural character. For example, it should be easier to build more houses or buildings on a lot without subdividing (to allow multi-generational housing). Some would like to see looser building restrictions.

Fewer people made comments about the following:

- Don't change much. Keep rural Multnomah County how it is.
- Abide by the National Scenic Area (NSA) Plan to protect the majesty of the Gorge. This means enforcing screening requirements and restricting commercial uses.
- Limit heavy trucks driving in residential areas, or enforce noise restrictions.
- Lower taxes.
- Better visitor management in East Multnomah County/Gorge Scenic Area.

## 5) Is there anything else you would like to tell us about present conditions or future trends that should be addressed by Multnomah County? *(49 comments)*

Many people reiterated comments and concerns from the previous comment form questions. Some of the main themes in response to this question included:

- Concern about growing populations moving into rural areas and putting stress on services and increasing traffic.
- The need to keep rural Multnomah County rural, with protection of farm and forest lands.
- Desire for a simplified, less expensive, more flexible, and more transparent land use permitting process, and more helpful planning staff.
- Desire for more flexibility in using private property for economic uses and building. This includes making it easier to make a living by farming and selling farm products.

Some other comments included:

- Truly listen to public input in this process. One person suggested a town-hall type meeting, and a couple of others enjoyed the open house materials.
- Please include wildlife experts on the Comprehensive Plan TAC.
- Make sure you reach out to young people, people of color, and low-income communities.
- Desire for mountain bike trails in Forest Park.
- Desire for better fire and police services.
- Ensure that the Sauvie Island Rural Center continues to be used as a gathering space for community members, without external "conditional uses."
- Make sure that the Comprehensive Plan includes clear guidelines for the use of small acreage (MUA) land use as well as large (EFU) preservation.

- Desire to reduce taxes and size of government.
- Concern about traffic in school areas. There should be better efforts to improve safety of students walking to school as vehicle traffic increases.
- Improve visibility on Stark Street Bridge.

## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The comment form asked participants to answer a few demographic questions.

### Race

Almost all participants who answered this question identified as Caucasian (93%). One person identified as Hispanic, one as Asian/Pacific Islander, and two as “Other.”

### Language Spoken

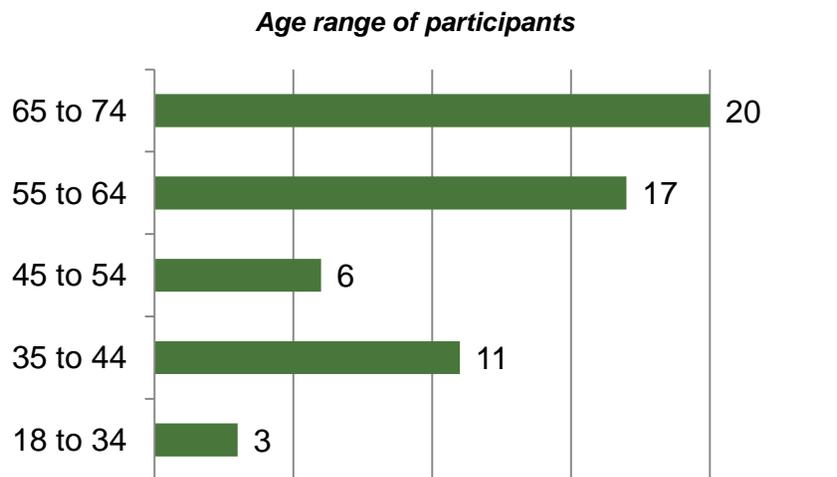
All participants said that they speak English as their primary language.

### Gender

53% of people who answered this question identified as female, as 47% as male.

### Age Range

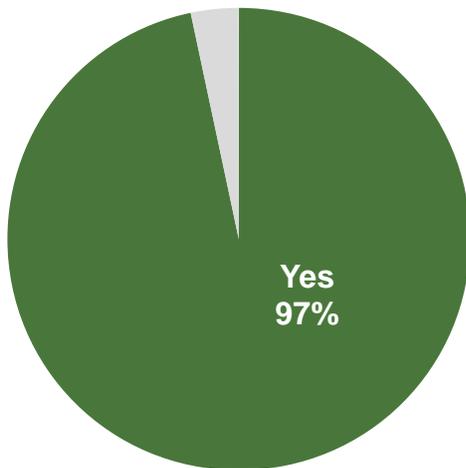
Participants were asked to indicate their age. Most participants (65%) said that they were over the age of 55.



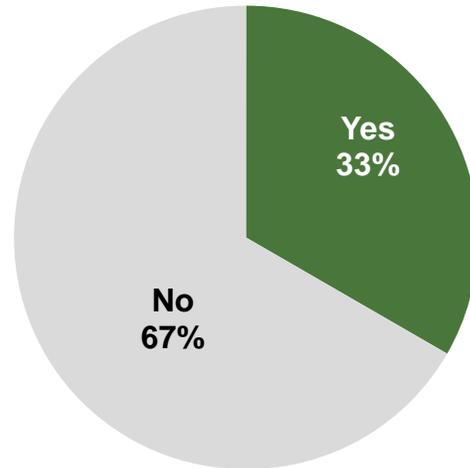
## Residency and Employment in Multnomah County

Participants were asked whether they live or work in rural Multnomah County. While most (97%) said that they live in rural Multnomah County, only 33% said that they work in rural Multnomah County.

*Do you live in Rural Multnomah County?*



*Do you work in Rural Multnomah County?*



## Notification

Participants were asked how they found out about the open houses or online open houses. Most said they were notified via a poster or flyer, or by word of mouth.

*How did you find out about the open house meetings?*

