



memo

to **Kevin Cook and Megan Gibb, Multnomah County**
from **Emma-Quin Smith, Carrie Brennecke, and Matt Hastie, MIG**
re **Task 5.3 - Community Engagement Summary**
Multnomah County Code Improvement Project
date **09/15/2025**

Introduction

The Multnomah County Zoning Code Improvement Project (ZCIP) team conducted a series of community meetings to gather feedback regarding potential County Code updates. The primary objective of these meetings was to present key findings and seek feedback on potential policy options and approaches to addressing issues identified in the draft Code Audit and Key Findings Summary reports completed in Phase 1 of this project.

Each meeting included a presentation given by the project team and a question and answer session with participants. These meetings were an opportunity to inform and communicate accurate, understandable, transparent, and timely information with the community. The meetings also sought to ensure community members understand how decisions about the future code amendments will be made, that their concerns are heard, and that they know how their feedback has influenced or is anticipated to influence project decisions.

To provide convenient opportunities for community members to share their input on the code update project, the MIG team and County staff coordinated with neighborhood associations to publicize and co-host the meetings. Where possible, the meetings took place on regularly scheduled neighborhood meeting dates. The team conducted the meetings on the following dates:

- Forest Park Neighborhood Association, July 24, 2025
- Sauvie Island Community Association, August 5, 2025
- Northeast Multnomah County Community Association (NEMCCA), August 21, 2025

A hybrid in-person and online meeting was held at the County's Multnomah Building on Friday, August 22, 2025. This meeting was intended to focus on the needs of farmers and agricultural landowners but was open to all members of the public.

Additionally, an online survey was available for community members to fill out from August 1 to September 8, 2025. The survey webpage included an introductory message from Land Use Planning Director, Megan Gibb, and a video of the project presentation that was given at the in-person meetings. This allowed community members who could not attend in-person meetings to see the same information as those who could participate in-person.

In total, approximately 120 people attended these meetings and another 55 people participated in one or more elements of the online meeting and survey, with the largest turnouts at the Sauvie Island and NEMCCA meetings (40-50 participants each).

Community Feedback

Community members confirmed that the challenges and code issues presented by the project team to date are the correct issues to address with a code update. There is a strong desire for simplification of the code, improved efficiency, enhanced customer service, and better inter-agency coordination throughout the land use permit application and approval process. Detailed commentary from community meetings and a summary of the online comment forms are attached to this document. The most commonly mentioned issues are highlighted below.

- **Code Complexity and Lack of Clarity.** Many community members commented on the complexity of the existing code language and emphasized the need for a code that is easier to understand and allows applicants to prepare their own applications without needing to hire professionals. A few commented on a lack of consistency in code interpretation across planners in the County planning department. Overly detailed language related to allowed uses restricts similar uses on a property unless the property owner submits a new permit application. Community members note that this can lead applicants to feel like they are defending their land use applications instead of working with the County to “get to ‘yes’” on an application. Residents also support the idea of switching to a one-column code format as recommended in the Code Audit.
- **Customer Service.** Community members consistently expressed frustration with long, unpredictable, and often delayed responses from planners. They cited planners taking every allotted day of a review window to process applications, raising issues at the last minute, and causing project delays that seemed unnecessary. It was suggested that the County re-open an in-person planning counter/permitting desk to allow applicants to ask a planner specific questions and receive a prompt response.
- **Burdensome and Lengthy Permitting Processes.** There is a strong desire from community members for expedited reviews, a clear set of expectations on application timelines, and prompt responses from planners. Community members requested the County move away from a “kick the can” approach that pushes

application issues to other stages of the application process. Lot of Record and Full Compliance provisions were identified as significant obstacles to completing a land use application and it was acknowledged that these are issues unique to the Multnomah County code. The current linear application process is seen as inefficient and more concurrent processes were suggested, especially for time sensitive, safety related projects like septic system updates. Concerns were raised that arduous permitting processes are leading people to undertake work without permits, potentially causing safety issues and revenue loss for the County.

- **Inter-agency Coordination Challenges.** While not directly related to zoning code text updates, County residents voiced frustration with lack of coordination between Multnomah County and other agencies that participate in land use or building permit review processes, including the City of Portland, Metro, and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (NSA) Commission. Specific examples of friction points in the application process included permitting septic systems within the NSA, and a lack of understanding of rural permitting requirements by City of Portland permitting staff. Participants recommended that the County consider updating how the permitted process interfaces with these other agencies and jurisdictions in order to better meet the needs of Multnomah County residents.

Key Takeaways & Next Steps

Overall, it is clear that County residents strongly support updating the Multnomah County Zoning Code. They cited a variety of ways the code can be simplified, streamlined, and improved. There is also a strong desire for improvement in customer service and changes to the staff culture of the planning department, which cannot be entirely addressed as part of this code update project. Such issues are long-term in nature and will require further orientation and training of staff and hiring additional staff in the coming months and years. However, changes to the code text such as updated application and review processes, more accessible language, and including more clear and objective standards will also support improvements in customer service. In the short term, customer service improvements and changes to staff culture are being addressed through ongoing efforts, including hiring new staff members and implementing new work policies and processes. Simplifying code provisions also will reduce the amount of time needed to respond to questions and review applications, freeing up staff time and allowing for more expedited review processes.

Several code issues identified by County residents as the greatest sources of frustration also have been identified by County staff as high-priority and are being addressed on an expedited timeline. These code issues are slated to be resolved ahead of overall the three-year timeline of the greater Zoning Code Improvement Project. Code updates that County staff will adopt in the near term include:

- Minor accessory structures
- Process for minor modifications to approved plans
- Process for Agricultural Fill Permit
- Process for Marijuana Business Permit
- Minor amendments to Administrative Procedures
- Other minor housekeeping amendments

The County is also working with the consultant team to update the following code issues within approximately six months:

- Lot of record verification
- Nonconforming uses
- Full compliance requirements

The expedited code update topics listed above were identified as some of the most burdensome sections of the code. However, the project team acknowledges a need for a variety of other changes to make the code more accessible and simplify the land use permit application process. Many of the other code issues identified by County residents aligned with needed code updates identified by County staff. The following code issues will be addressed over the next phases of this project, among others:

- Simplify code language and make the document more user friendly for applicants, staff, and decision-makers
- Reformat text to one-column
- Clarify application procedures and update process graphics
- Insert use tables for each base zone
- Right-size development standards like parking and architectural design standards
- Address state administrative rules and statutes
- Expand the use of graphics to illustrate key code standards
- Ensure requirements related to development of housing are clear and objective

The project team will continue to provide additional opportunities for community engagement as the work on these updates continues to progress.

Attachment A: Community Meeting Notes

Forest Park Neighborhood Association Meeting

July 24, 2025, 7-9pm

There were 11 attendees (outside of County staff and MIG team members)

Meeting Notes

- When does additional public review happen?
 - During phases 3 & 4 of the project (code writing and adoption phases).
- Is this a detailed look at the Code? Drilling down into every paragraph? Will there be lots of added code?
 - This will be a detailed update of the code, with a goal of making the code easier to understand, use, and administer. We are trying to simplify what exists and ensure that we meet state requirements. However, we don't plan to update every aspect of the document or every standard or procedure found in the code.
- What else should zoning do?
 - Protect farmland from data centers.
 - Provide predictability for development applicants and other community members.
- Is there an online version of the comment form? Where do we send the paper comment form?
 - We are working on an online questionnaire that includes the same types of questions we are asking you this evening. That questionnaire should be available within about a week on the County project webpage.
- The on-the-ground conditions and maps do not always align with each other; has that been addressed? Do you plan to conduct any site visits as part of this process? Do you intend to update the Zoning Map as part of this process.
 - County staff could potentially conduct site visits in the future if additional staff are available to conduct them. This project will not include amendments to the County's Zoning Map.
- Fees and Costs. Is there going to be a reduction?
 - Matt remarked that that is not part of this project.

- Kevin remarked the County will be updating its land use permitting fees procedures in the future and will be incorporating the ability to reduce or waive fees.
- Lot of Record – It has blown up projects, its expensive and takes time. It delayed a project of mine for a long time.
 - Matt remarked that the Lot of Record and process and definitions will be updated as part of the project, including streamlining the requirements and narrowing the types of lots that need to go through the process.
- A lot of folks move here from out of state. You need to clarify when they need to contact the County about a development project.
- Full Compliance – this is a big issue and very few applicants are able to meet the current code requirements. For example, a small project (wood shed) turned into huge process with many requirements.
 - Megan explained that Lot of Record and full compliance are being targeted for updates early in this process. Full compliance is unique to Multnomah County and takes a lot of staff time.
 - The Code is likely to be updated to clarify requirements associated with non-conforming situations as a replacement for the full compliance provisions.
- Tree removals for fire hazards – is it in code? People appear to be using it to remove trees unnecessarily.
 - Kevin remarked that “hazard trees” could be interpreted in a number of ways. The code does include requirements to reduce the potential for wildfires in the wildfire urban interface (WUI) areas of the County. The state fire marshal also has standards that they apply.
- Data centers should not be allowed on farmlands.
- Matt asked the group to identify their top priorities for items in the code that should be addressed in this project. Responses included the following:
 - Lot of Record
 - Full Compliance
 - Access requirements and turn-around areas for fire safety (Note: Kevin said these are primarily fire district requirements not determined by the County.)

Sauvie Island Community Association Meeting

August 5, 2025, 6:30-8:00 pm

There were about 45 attendees (outside of County staff, MIG, and DLCD representatives)

Meeting Notes

- Does adoption of updates to County Titles 28 and 29 which address uses in the Multnomah Channel fall under this project?
 - Kevin answered that it is separate from this project, but a process is under way to address those sections of the Code. That effort also includes preparation of a new intergovernmental agreement with the City of Portland, given that both the county and city regulate what happens in this area. Timeline for the completion of this effort is still to be determined.
- As part of this project is the County going to address farmland requirements related to agritourism and farm stands? Does the County intend to prohibit or limit farm stands. Small farms here are going out of business and need more support, including revenues from these types of businesses.
 - There has been a separate state rulemaking process happening recently regarding farmstands and agritourism.
 - The state Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) started looking at the rules draft and got over 2,000 comments about potential changes to them. The state's intent was to clarify the rules, not to limit farmstands. The number of comments provided has made the state rethink the approach it had been taking to changes to those rules. The reality is that farming is much different than it was 50 years ago and it is clear that small farmers need these secondary income streams to survive. The state will be considering that as it continues to review those rules.
- How does this process connect with the planning process that was done several years ago for the island and channel (the update to the Sauvie Island Plan)? These plans provide important context for what happens here and people on the island put a lot of time and effort into that planning process.
 - Sauvie Island Plan includes policies that guide how the code is implemented. It is an element of the County's Comprehensive Plan, which provides the overarching policy framework for how the Development Code is written and implemented.
 - Our hope is to honor the policies in the Sauvie Island Plan as part of the code update process and ensure that the two documents are consistent.

- Will the Sauvie Island Plan or the Comprehensive Plan have to be updated again as a result of this project?
 - Our main objective is to implement the Sauvie Island Plan through updates to the Development Code.
- The code needs to be less restrictive for a lot of types of development and coordination between the County and the City of Portland needs to be improved. I recently went through a year and a half process for land use application and spent a significant amount of money to do so.
- A lot of farms are doing different things and some have duck hunting clubs, but alongside that are conservation programs. This needs to be considered as part of the update. When you own property, you're trying to be a good conservationist and steward, and the impacts of those actions on your taxes need to be taken into account.
- Is there an intent with the code update to make things easier for the planners who are reviewing applications? I have done several application processes and have had to deal with kick the can approach to getting to yes. Approvals take a very long time to get through. How can we expedite the process? Can we change the mindset and priorities to focus on efficiency? Planning departments can fall into two pitfalls: not recognizing their charge to serve the community and try their best to move things forward. Some fall into a cultural paralysis that becomes counterproductive. You need to create a culture of affirmation instead of saying no as a default.
 - Yes! One of our goals is to make it easier for planners to administer the code and easier for applicants to understand.
- I recently finished a two-car garage, replacing a 1950s barn structure. It was a 25 month process and resulted in a 68-page application. I had to hire a professional planner to do the application and spent over \$23,000 with application fees to build a garage. I had to draft a covenant and have it recorded saying that we won't have anyone living in it and submit a septic system permit even if there's no water or drain in the garage and no bathroom or cooking facilities.
 - The goal is to try to make the code more effective to use and to remove obstacles. We are not going to remove the need to comply with existing laws that are in place but we trying to make the process more efficient and easier to navigate.
 - We also are trying to hire new people and change the attitude and culture to be more helpful and customer service oriented.

- I am excited about this project. In rural planning areas, the City and County often don't know what the other is doing. I also had to hire professional help for a barn permit. Why are city amenities like sidewalks and streetlights coming into this project when we are at the end of a rural road with no streetlights or sidewalks anywhere in the vicinity?
 - We are looking to coordinate city/county processes and procedures and are looking at right sizing development requirements.
- How are you planning to change the culture at the County? We walk in and it seems like we are treated as if we are the enemy and like we're doing something wrong. I had to file a freedom of information act (FOIA) request to figure out what we were allowed to do on our own property.
 - Changing the culture of our staff is going to be a process and it won't happen overnight. I don't have all the answers about how we're going to do it but we are committed to changing that culture. We want to hire people who are excited to help people figure out what they can do with their property.
- The County tried to deny us permits for renovating existing structures based on requirements to have curbs along our property frontage. Do County employees use Google Earth?
 - In part this is an issue with the City of Portland since they review building permits for all of Multnomah County, including the areas where our zoning and development code apply. County doesn't have a building department, and we contract with City for building permit review (or Gresham for some area) via an intergovernmental agreement.
 - Sounds like the building permit coordination is having lots of missteps. We can do our best to help Portland understand that different standards apply here but we probably can't completely solve that problem at the County.
- The County offloads the building permit process onto the City but the person at the City doesn't remember that they are working with someone in a rural part of the County. It feels like no one at the County is following up with that process.
- When I lived in South Dakota, the permitting process for a garage ADU took \$1,300 and 24 hours. Maybe we can get closer to that process!
- Does the County have clear and objectives standards that allow for an administrative review for certain things? It seems like that would make a lot of sense. I applied for permits to install solar energy equipment and the County was not supportive when that feels like something they should support.

- I was required to prepare a tree protection plan and apply it to every tree on my 120-acre property. It took over a month to resolve the question and address the disconnect between City & County to the point where I did not have to do that (which should not have been required in the first place).
- In some places there is a checkerboard pattern of RR and EFU-1 and EFU-2 zoning. Will this process include changes to the zoning map?
 - At this time, we are not intending to change the zoning map itself. That is not part of this process.
- Are there any uses that just have a list of boxes to check?
 - That is the goal of this project is to figure out how to do more of that in the County.
 - We are looking at how to make accessory uses easier to build.
- It would be nice to have a code where you can prepare an application yourself and not need to hire a professional to submit a land use application.
- Planning Counter process is prolonged and detached. Things really changed during COVID and they haven't gotten back to normal.
- The process to get solar installed has been really hard to get through.
 - Improving that process would be consistent with implementing the County's goals of climate resilience.

Matt asked what some of the highest priority issues are to address as part of this process. Answers included the following:

- Customer service and prompt turnaround.
- Relationship between City & County permitting processes.
- Make things simpler and less onerous to get through a process.
- Consistency of interpretation.

Northeast Multnomah County Community Association (NEMCCA) Meeting

August 21, 2025, 6:30-8:30 pm

There were approximately 40 attendees (outside of County staff and MIG team members)

Meeting Notes

- To what extent was the scenic area code covered in the audit?
 - Kevin: This audit didn't cover the scenic area code. That is not the primary focus of this project because the NSA goes through a separate update process. We still want to hear about friction points between the two codes though, because we can address those in future projects with the Gorge commission.
- Why can't you put an ADU on a lot in Multnomah County?
 - Kevin: It depends on if you're inside or outside of the scenic area.
 - Megan: We anticipate addressing this with the zoning code update. The state has modernized rules around this.
- Lots of people do lot of record inquiries. Isn't there a way to look at records and verify them that way?
 - Kevin: We are looking at the standards right now to update and simplify them. Sometimes it is simple to look at a map and verify a lot, but sometimes there are subdivisions of lots that weren't tracked in the past where more research is needed to confirm the lot is consistent with the definition of a lot of record.
 - Megan: These three issues are not going to wait: full compliance, lot of record, non-conforming uses. Code language is being updated now related to these topics on a shorter timeline and is not going through the whole three-year code update process.
- Why can't an address assignment request be processed on vacant land.
 - Lisa: A code change made it such that you can't address vacant land. It's a code issue.
- What's the time frame for addressing these issues? Who do we speak to about this?
 - Kevin: In total, this is a three-year process. Email me directly with questions or comments.
- My property title is registered with the county. Why can't the County just access the lot records?
 - Kevin: That's a process question and we don't know how easy it is to just find that information.
- Comment: A lot of record database needs to be created.

- Comment: I am dealing with Clackamas County and they already have an extensive lot of record cataloging. They have a file for each verified lot.
 - Kevin: We'd like to make this process better for everybody.
- Living in the National Scenic Area, we appreciate the effort to clarify the code for the County, but there is nobody to answer questions. We can't get anything done, including building and permitting a little shed to run my chicken business. It's challenging to have so many planning problems and so many code issues stacked on top of each other.
- The whole Scenic Area code needs to be revised and updated. There are some crazy provisions in the Scenic Area Management Plan. There needs to be some solutions and changes. It's good to have all the historical knowledge in the room.
- The Gorge recently went through an overview and update to the Scenic Area Management Plan and it is a county-by-county process to update the zoning code for that area. The Gorge Commission only does appeals. Multnomah County is much more strict than other counties on uses in the Scenic Area.
- The Health Hardship process is very slow, expensive and hard. It should be cheap, easy, and fast.
- The County should allow multiple processes at once. Currently you have a very linear application process that can take a very long time. We want more concurrent processes like septic reviews. You need to bring it in-house, not just farm it out to the City of Portland. Septic folks won't do work in Multnomah County because the people at the City take so long and are dragging out the process.
- I recently applied for a solar permit and was told that the allowed amount wouldn't support half of the use of the house. Standards are much lower.
 - Lisa: The code allows for you to put panels on your house/property up to the amount that you need on your property.
- People are finding loopholes to following permitting process. For example, a 60 square foot shed is allowed outright with no permit in the NSA so people build rows of 60 square foot sheds on their property to meet storage needs without having to pull a permit instead of building one larger structure.
 - Lisa: That is in the Scenic Area Management Plan and the county is required to adopt and apply that standard.
 - Kevin: What is the frequency of review of the Management Plan?
 - McKenzie: The Gorge Commission is required to update it every 5-10 years. The last update was in 2020. Process will start again in the next biennium.
- The Springdale Rural Center (SRC) zone needs to be updated.

- Megan: The goal for this code update is to make a “medium, regular” code. This comment is a valid comment and we will address community use provisions as part of this update.
 - Lisa: The SRC zone was updated not that long ago, and those regulations are mandated by the state.
 - Kevin: The County has to adhere to state law, but acknowledges there are some process failures which should be addressed.
- Developing properties is too hard because of the approval process, especially approval of septic systems. Septic is technically in the Gorge area. You have to dig a test pit area after getting approved by the National Scenic Area (NSA) requirements. You have to spend thousands of dollars to get approved by the NSA and then start the process with the County.
- Trying to do development right is impossible, so you have to break the rules to get anything done.
- Allowed Use language is too detailed and does not allow for similar uses on a property without submitting a new land use permit application. For example, a building previously approved for use as an air conditioning repair shop could not be used as a plumbing shop without submitting an application to County. Those are essentially the same use (HVAC facility) but narrow interpretation of the Code prohibited the “change of uses.”
- Find ways to get to yes rather than no. Shift the mindset to “make things happen.” Look for the yes’s.
- Look to permit what’s permissible.
- There is only one person at the City right now that handles septic permit processes. How is she going to handle that?
- How do you fix that?
 - Megan: The first step is to have a conversation with the Gorge Commission. There are many similar issues that we’re trying to work on right now.
 - McKenzie: The US Forest Service does cultural resource determinations. If a piece of land has already been surveyed, it can move through the process faster. Properties without surveys take longer. We are willing to ask the Forest Service about the test pit issue.
- There should be an expedited review process for septic instead of a full-blown site review process.
 - Lisa: The Gorge Commission has to allow an expedited review. There are lower fees for septic replacement.

- It's hard to get answers to questions about things that are going to be good for the community.
- Septic repairs get bootlegged in. Arduous permitting/application processes are causing the County to lose revenue and making things more dangerous in the County because people are just choosing to do work without pulling permits.
 - Kevin: safety is an important point.
 - Megan: there seems to be a disincentive to pull permits.
- When are we going to get a meeting summary with a timeline to fix things? All we hear is "we're going to work on it" not "we will have this fixed by." Complaints keep getting brought up but nothing is happening.
 - Megan will get back to Victoria.
- Need to get answers to people more quickly and simplify what Multnomah County's Planning Department is doing.
- Megan: We are happy to sit down with folks and come up with workarounds to some of the issues that people have raised. We have a six month-ish timeline to complete work on the high priority issues that are underway now. We also are working on changing the culture at the County.
- Community commitment to share when it's working.
- I have two issues with house plans submitted to the County including requiring a splash guard for gutter downspouts. The power of "no" is wielded too quickly at the County. These are stupid small issues.
- Stormwater certificates are required as part of the land use review permit process. There are more and more layers to applications that are just harder for the County to process. Daylighting is not allowed.
 - Megan: In some cases, we may be applying urban requirements in rural areas. This project aims to right size that aspect of the code.
- It took us over a month to resolve a crawlspace issue with a land use permit. That has nothing to do with land use, that's structural. Why can't you just change the process tonight?
 - Megan: State law dictates the process for adopting code amendments.
- Multnomah County's budget is twice what Troutdale has. Why are the County's fees higher than Troutdale's?
 - Megan: Recent fee increases were not based on a staff recommendation, but the BOCC determined that fees needed to increase in order to pay to hire new planner and expand the planning staff capacity.
- Having face-to-face planning staff would be helpful.

Hybrid County Building/Online Meeting

August 22, 2025, 1-2pm

There was 1 attendee in-person, 12 on-line (outside of County staff and MIG team members)

Meeting Notes

- Scott – This is a great set of priorities. I love that you're doing this project and the process and think it is great timing. Suggestion – talk to groups that own farm and forest land to involve the agricultural community. The Multnomah County Farm Bureau is a good group of over 150 members. Non-conforming uses is something we keep tripping up on. Need path for those. Need path for farmers to buy land and build a house and it was removed from the Multnomah County code even when it is allowed by state law. Revisit to allow a path for young farmers to build a home on the farm. When you get a chance to simplify the code, please do that. The permitting desk reopening is a great step. Look for sections of code that add complexity but have no value. Example: In EFU areas, someone can't build a house if the farm has received 5,000 yards of fill in the last 20 years. Look where Multnomah County has regulations that are not state required and don't make sense or create barriers to farming or farmers. Simplify code and eliminate goofy rules. Legal services is one of my biggest three operating expenses.
- Megan mentioned the online meeting opportunities for farmers. The summer meetings are hard for farmers to attend. Scott will distribute website and online opportunities to the Farm Bureau and encourage members to participate in the online survey.
- Scott- expectations around application timing is beneficial. Expectations on when the applicants will hear back would be very helpful for applicants. Example: If it typically takes 30 days to get a decision on a Type I application, it would be great to know that. It gives people not typically involved in land use planning processes an expectation for the time it might take to resolve their issue or at least hear back from a planner. It will also help people know how long to wait until they call back to check on the status of an earlier request. Make GIS easier for people to find. People can sometimes answer their own questions if they have access to that information. Who has control of GIS and how can changes be made to that information if it isn't accurate? Example: A Natural Hazards maps on land may say that it is steep when in fact it is flat. How does someone get corrections like that made? Having this meeting is one of the best things you all have done in 10 years. Retaining planning staff is a priority. The turnover is tough on applicants and staff.

- Matt encouraged people on-line to fill out the comment card online, link on the County website.
- Code should be written to help young farmers start farming especially, given aging farming populations. Often applicants are met with skepticism from staff. Changing those attitudes also is important.
- No comments or questions from people on-line.
- The Farm Bureau meets at Rossie Farms once a month and County staff are welcome to attend those meetings and provide more information about this process or others.

Attachment B: Online Survey Summary

The online survey was available from August 1 to September 8, 2025. A welcome video message and a more detailed presentation video accompanied the survey questions. Eight (8) people provided complete responses and 49 people provided partial responses. This indicates that many people reviewed one or more of the videos but did not respond to the majority of the survey questions. The following summary represents all of the responses received. Some comments have been edited for clarity.

The key takeaways from survey responses generally align with comments from community meeting attendees and priorities identified by the project team:

- The application process is cumbersome, expensive, and excessively time consuming.
- The code is hard to understand and is too open to interpretation by applicants and planners alike.
- Faster response times from specific staff and the ability to speak with a planner prior to starting the application process would make the application process easier.
- Simplifying code language and changing full compliance and lot of record requirements would make it easier to submit applications.

Do you have experience using the Multnomah County Zoning Code? If so, how have you used it?

- Four (4) responses: I have submitted a land use application for my own property before.
- I have been impacted by land use applications process and permits and submitted compliance complaints and feedback on developments.
- I investigated land use requirements prior to purchasing a home in Columbia River gorge national scenic area; would like to see Chapter 38 updates
- I work for an SWCD. I sometimes work with landowners who are going through a land use application. I also need to know the tax status of properties, for example if they are under a forest or agricultural tax deferral.
- I have used it to guide changes to our District's farm and to support conservation easement/fee title acquisitions for the long-term protection of ag land.

Please share more about the type of application you have submitted.

- I submitted and was granted in 2023 a NSA Site Review in 2020; I submitted and received a NSA Expedited permit for roof solar panels and pole barn.
- House, barn
- I consulted with a landowner who wanted to change the location of agricultural use and a habitat restoration mitigation site.

- Type II application and legal lot of record.
- Culvert replacement, Lot Line adjustment.

How could the code be improved to make submitting a land use application easier?

- I see many cases where the exceptions included in the current code, or the wording of the code, or the application for a conditional use permit allows activity that directly contradicts the underlying intention of the code. For example, allowing a development in an environmental overlay zone which allows buildings and paving that covers 85% of the site is not supporting wildlife habitat. Allowing non-agricultural uses in EFU protected farmland (such as a cell phone tower) does not protect our limited high quality farm soils. Using wording such as "consistent with the character of the area" is bound to be widely variable in interpretation, even between county staff and a hearings officer. If the code was written with wording that was clear and if the bottom line decisions were based on "does this protect the land use we zoned it to protect" rather than "can we work with the owner to make it work out the way they want it to" we'd be much better off.
- Include Table of Contents and/or Appendices that reference by subject matter. Please number pages uniformly. Be able to talk to a live person prior to pre-app.
- Much faster response time from county planners with a name and contact attached! Code that is not open to interpretation. Delete lot of record investigations. Delete 'full compliance' requirements. Allow non-discriminatory paths to deal with so many 'overlays' to permits.
- I'm not sure, I haven't personally submitted a land use application.
- Simplify!! Even staff members have trouble telling us what reports we need to submit, if it requires an engineer and a lawyer to interpret it is a good sign it is too complicated. We should not have to pay (on top of the outrageous property taxes) to have a staff member interpret the codes to know what we have to submit. There should also be a clear timeline that we can track rather than submitting to a black hole. If the county is contracting services out to Portland city such as building and septic, we should be able to move on components simultaneously. The length of time our application took was ridiculous - over 8 months for septic, over a year for land use in total, about seven months for lot of record.
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) should be recognized within the code's definition of community service. East Multnomah SWCD was founded by the agricultural community of east Multnomah County to provide landowners with services that reduce soil erosion and improve water quality. Our programs provide technical advice, landscape-level planning, and cost-share opportunities to steward healthy farmland (Goal 3), protect and enhance habitat (Goal 5) and implement the Clean Water Act using voluntary measures (Goal 6). There are

sections of the code that recognize school and fire districts as community service uses and SWCDs should also be included.

- With regard to the Orient Rural Center Residential (4.C.5), EMSWCD has a long-term goal of creating a community service hub, or field station, to provide agricultural and conservation services for residents in east Multnomah County. This use would be adjacent to our Headwaters Farm and would be consistent with the rural character of the area by offering a place to meet with landowners, host workshops on soil health and convene community members for education related to soil and water health. This use should be a Review Use within the Orient Rural Center Residential.

If you have used the code, are there any code provisions that you are aware of that work particularly well?

- Fire department signing off.
- I think the general rules surrounding forest use make sense and work well to allow for a balance between forest management and residential use.

If you have started a land use application, or thought about it but didn't submit, what made you stop the process?

- We located our new house outside of areas subordinate to NSA's Key Viewing Areas. I received a NSA Expedited permit to mount < 200 sq. ft. solar panels (expedited permit limit) on my roof in 2023. 200 sq. ft of panels only generated 1/2 of average home usage in this area. Adequate panels for our needs require a permit for full site review (it would be the 3rd review for the same location). Permit cost prohibits this additional investment. I will miss the alternative energy tax incentives that will be eliminated this year.
- Time it takes to deal with county and lack of response time and names and contacts. Money it requires to ask permission. Headaches it takes to deal with different interpretations and overly zealous code and time frames. Stress of dealing with county and code. Lack of integrity with some longtime planners.
- We withdrew a CU application for a building on Orient Drive (Rural Center) because SWCDs were not explicitly mentioned.

Please rank the following issues in terms of their priority to address:

(1 star = not very important, 5 stars = very important)

The median value reported for each issue.

User-friendly: ★★★★★

Environmental Protections: ★★★★★
Updated Development Standards: ★☆☆☆☆
Simplified Application procedures: ★★★★★
Update conditional use criteria: ★★★★★
Update conditional use list: ★★★★★☆

Are there any other key code issues that we have missed?

- Yes. Code has to have conditions that are enforceable which means either an infraction can be investigated and (in some situations) measured and communicated and punished promptly, OR the permit or code should not allow the activity at all. Allowing fill up to a certain quantity or in certain locations or of a certain type, but being unable to determine how much has been brought in, or to get onsite to inspect the location and type of material, is useless. In addition, it is not fair to expect the public/nearby homeowners to conduct something like a traffic study or biological study to counter a developer's version in an application. It leads to the developer finding contractors who provide them with findings or limiting findings to those that support the development. If nearby landowners counter the data with anything other than an expensive study of their own, such as pointing out data missing in the contractor's data, their feedback is not weighted. The decisions should be based on unbiased studies.
- I am concerned that this simplification could erode existing protection, and I hope that is not the case. Our area is already heavily threatened by tree cutting and other forms of development. I would especially like to ask the team to look at "Tree Code, Title 11," which apparently does not apply to County Urban Pocket Areas, such as unincorporated Multnomah County. This loophole is allowing landowners to cut all the trees on a forested site, then sell it, stripping all of the protections it should have from cutting trees. I would like to see the Tree Code extended to prevent non-development related tree removals. Our area has vital wildlife corridors and some of the last large remaining high-elevation forested wilderness. Thank you!
- Pull back on all the environmental overlays that cost customers a ridiculous amount. Enforce the permits you have already allowed. Put more time in enforcement vs policy making. Make it easier to ask permission instead of forgiveness. Answer the phone!!! Identify planners with names and contacts. Work in office, not at home so planners can collaborate and the desk can open again. Stop with the political agenda and just do the job of land use planners. We don't

care how you identify or about political correctness or land acknowledgments. We just want our questions answered and help with permits.

- The size of plants required for environmental mitigation projects seems very large (1-2 gallon potted plants), especially for larger mitigation areas where hundreds or thousands of plants are required. This can be extremely costly for the landowner. I think the use of restoration-grade bare-root plants would be more economical and would still lead to successful restoration outcomes.

If you have any additional comments you would like to add to the conversation about improvements to the Multnomah County Code, please use the space below.

- In our area, it seems like the landowners who are trying to get permits and operate in a way that supports land quality (such as putting in a wildlife pond) are put through the ringer, while other landowners who choose to act without permits or in blatant disregard for the conditions of the permit get away with their actions with no consequences that act as a deterrent to further transgressions. A current permit violation should prevent further permits from being granted. Inspection of conditions should be part of permit requirements. I guess my main point is that code should be updated in a way that takes into account compliance enforcement that can make the code work. There's no point in having a code that is unenforceable.
- Thank you for protecting our natural resources.
- Septic approval process was the most onerous permit process that I have ever dealt with.
- It's completely broken. Start over. Choose people and housing over land sitting idle. Be like other states without this complicated zoning that prioritizes environmental agendas. We don't have the luxury to do that anymore with population growth and extreme lack of housing in Oregon. We need permits for housing and for jobs!!
- I have the hardest time just figuring out what the different taxlot "codes" mean in our GIS Taxlot layer. I'd love it if there were handy tables listing the different values and what they mean/what rules apply to them.
- It took over three years for us to get a legal lot of record and land use application. The cost and time would and has sent most people running. If the purpose is to stop growth, it is working. The county has an outdated process, cumbersome, expensive and it is limiting housing, land clean up, job growth and tax dollars.
- I appreciate the opportunity to provide input.