

How to Influence Local Development

A guide for Washington County, Oregon residents

Development proposals can feel overwhelming, but residents often have more influence than they realize—especially if they become involved early. Oregon's land use system is highly structured and deadline-driven. The most effective advocacy combines good research, participation in the formal process, strong community involvement, and a solid understanding of the applicable laws.

A guide to information sources can be found [here](#).

1. Learn About the Proposal

Act Early

The earlier you become involved, the more opportunities you have to influence a project. Once permits have been approved, your options become much more limited.

- Find out where the plans stand in the [planning stages](#). It may still be in the concept or pre-application stage and no formal application may have been submitted.
- Determine whether the location is in incorporated or unincorporated Washington County. Incorporated cities may have tree codes that affect decisions; unincorporated Washington County generally does not regulate or require permits for general private property tree removal, except for trees located in [Significant Natural Resources \(SNR\)](#) areas or specific commercial parking lots.
- Contact [Washington County's Planning and Development Services](#) to learn the status of the proposal and obtain copies of available documents.
- Find out which procedure type governs the application. Washington County uses three main review tiers for land use and development: Type I (administrative review with no recognizable impacts), Type II (administrative review with public notice and limited impacts), and Type III (quasi-judicial review requiring a public hearing). Detailed application guides and resources are managed through [Washington County Current Planning](#).
- Attend Neighborhood Meetings hosted by the developer or the county. Ask questions, submit written comments, and meet other residents who share your

concerns. Illustrations shown at public meetings do not always communicate the full scope of a project.

- Reach out to the developer, property owner, or real estate representative to better understand the project and discuss your concerns.

Research the Rules

Development decisions are based on adopted laws—not public opinion alone. Research the regulations that apply to the property. Research the planning ordinances to find out if there is a way to halt development. Determine whether the proposal must comply with protections for wetlands, streams, floodplains, significant trees, wildlife habitat, or other natural resources.

- **Scrutinize Oregon Statewide Planning Goals** including [Goal 5](#), which regulates whether and how development can take place near [Significant Natural Resources \(SNR\)](#).
- **Search the [Washington County Community Development Code](#)** for regulations that apply to the project
- **Check consistency with the [Comprehensive Plan](#) and zoning code.** Developers must show compliance with the county's Comprehensive Framework Plan and the applicable Community Plan; inconsistencies are common grounds for appeal.
- **Research how the local [Community Plan](#)** may affect your area.
- **Check [Metro policies](#),** where applicable

Learn About the Site

- **Gather information about the site** before changes occur. Look for:
 - Significant trees
 - Wetlands and streams
 - Wildlife habitat
 - Steep slopes
 - Flood hazards
 - Existing tree inventories
 - Metro or county natural resource maps
 - Historic aerial photographs
- Use our [Tree Investigation Checklist](#) and our checklist of [Questions to Ask About a Development Proposal](#) to guide your thinking when reviewing a development proposal.
- Photograph the property and surrounding neighborhood. Date your photographs so they can serve as documentation if conditions later become an issue.
- Consider how the area may be impacted by the development. For example, assuming households may have one or two cars or more each, the development could add a significant number of cars to the area — impacting traffic congestion

and air quality, especially if those are already concerns in your neighborhood. Also look at the proposed housing density: will homes be packed together with little room for trees?

- Read this excellent guide: [*How to Win Land Development Issues*](#).
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2. Participate in the Formal Land Use Process

These steps carry the greatest legal weight. Oregon's land use system is process-driven, and missing a deadline can eliminate your ability to challenge a decision.

Read the Entire Application

Don't rely solely on project summaries or public presentations. Request and review:

- the complete application
- staff reports
- site plans
- arborist reports
- traffic studies
- stormwater reports
- environmental studies
- engineering plans

Many successful appeals identify inconsistencies or unsupported conclusions within these documents.

Build Your Case Around Evidence

Oregon decision-makers generally must approve projects that comply with applicable regulations. Rather than simply opposing a project, explain how it may fail to meet specific approval criteria. Focus on issues such as:

- tree preservation
- wetlands
- streams
- stormwater management
- flooding
- traffic safety
- wildlife habitat
- environmental impacts
- compliance with zoning and Comprehensive Plan policies

Support your comments with photographs, maps, expert reports, and references to applicable code sections whenever possible.

Get on the Record

Once an application is filed, submit written or oral testimony at public hearings during the public comment period. In Oregon, participating in the record generally preserves your ability to appeal later. If you never comment, you typically can't appeal.

Ask Questions

Questions often receive more productive responses than accusations. For example:

- How was this tree preservation calculation performed?
- Which code section authorizes this design?
- How was the traffic analysis prepared?
- What alternatives were considered?
- Is it possible to install better visual buffering to preserve natural views enjoyed by nearby homeowners?
- What about impacts on local school enrollment? Can your fire and police departments provide adequate protection for the proposed development? Is there adequate water and sewer infrastructure available to meet the new demand? Be very careful when talking about traffic and property values as negative impacts of development

Consider Expert Assistance

Depending on the issues involved, consider consulting:

- certified [arborists](#)
- land use planners
- traffic engineers
- hydrologists
- wetland scientists
- land use attorneys

Professional expertise can sometimes identify issues that are difficult for non-specialists to recognize.

Look for Other Required Permits

Some developments require approvals from additional agencies. Examples include:

- Wetlands or waterways may require [Oregon Department of State Lands](#) or [Army Corps of Engineers](#) permits.
- Major stormwater or traffic impacts may trigger [Oregon Department of Environmental Quality \(DEQ\)](#) or [Oregon Department of Transportation \(ODOT\)](#) review.

- Check whether [Metro](#) has a role. Because Washington County sits inside the Portland metro area's Urban Growth Boundary, some development types are also subject to Metro's regional framework plan — a separate avenue for objections. These agencies may provide additional opportunities for public review or comment.

Request Public Records

File public records requests for correspondence between the developer and the county. Public records requests can reveal commitments, waivers, timeline information, technical analyses, permit documents, or other information that may not be obvious from the application itself. [Here's how](#) to file.

Seek Assistance From Your Community

- **Contact [1000 Friends of Oregon](#).** This nonprofit focuses specifically on Oregon land use law and sometimes provides free guidance, or even representation, in LUBA appeals.
- **Reach out to your city's Urban Arborist** if you live in an incorporated area.
- Contact your local [Community Participation Organization](#) (CPO). Development information has traditionally been routed through CPOs, which serve as liaisons between the community and county government.
- **Contact us at [Treekeepers](#).** We may have educational resources, technical information, or contacts that could assist with tree-related concerns.
- **Work with your local Homeowners Association** if you have one. Become active in your HOA or neighborhood association. If possible, serve on its board or land use committee. Get the HOA to write letters to authorities about your issue.

***Note:** In January 2026, the Washington County Board of Commissioners voted to restructure the CPO program by consolidating it into four district-wide groups and pausing operations through summer 2026, with a relaunch planned for fall 2026. Until then, this may not be a reliable source of information. Some neighborhoods are instead working through city neighborhood programs or exploring annexation into nearby cities.*

Request Additional Time

If you need time to gather evidence or obtain expert opinions, ask for a continuance of the [hearing](#). Hearing officers may grant additional time under appropriate circumstances.

3. Build Community Support

- **Talk with your neighbors.** Talk to every neighbor you see to spread your campaign by word of mouth. When you see a neighbor walking their dog for example, say, "Did you know this

property may be developed?" Build an email list to keep interested residents informed. Go door to door, set up a website, host a meeting, and use any other communication tools available to share information. Be sure to include your elected officials in your communications and ask them to attend your meetings. Post signs, checking first to be sure you will not be in violation of the local sign codes.

- **Build Credibility**

Decision-makers are more likely to trust residents who:

- acknowledge both benefits and impacts of a project
- accurately quote the code
- avoid exaggeration
- correct mistakes when they discover them
- treat applicants and staff respectfully
- distinguish between facts and opinions

A reputation for fairness often gives neighborhood advocates more influence over time.

- **Create a website.**

- **Post regularly on social media:** Nextdoor, Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter). Always verify information before posting and encourage respectful discussion.
- **Attend the developer's [neighborhood meetings](#).** Raise objections orally and in writing. Connect with other concerned neighbors who attend. Ask specific questions — illustrations, for example, may not reveal the full extent of the plans for the site.
- **Share your message with media:** local news stations, local newspapers, and your networks. Find out if there's a local talk radio show where you might express your opposition. Write opinion pieces for the newspaper.
- **Reach Out to Elected Officials.** Email, call, and write to local officials who have authority over the issue, including [Washington County Board of Commissioners](#), city councilors, planning commissioners, or Metro councilors when appropriate. While elected officials generally cannot overturn quasi-judicial land use decisions outside the formal process, they can help highlight policy concerns and advocate for improvements to future regulations. Organize those on your email list to reach out to those officials directly. Include talking points to make it easy for them to be effective. Find out how to get on the next agenda for the [Planning Commission meetings](#) and share your opinions, even if the item is not scheduled for consideration.

- **Organizing an Effective Public Meeting**

- Wear the same color shirt.
- Arrive early.
- Coordinate speakers.

- Avoid repeating testimony.
 - Divide topics among speakers.
 - Be respectful.
 - Bring printed materials.
- **Prepare to offer alternative actions and ideas.** Find ways to negotiate, offer alternatives, and potentially be a partner, rather than just opposition. If the land up for rezoning is for sale, is your group willing to buy it or find a conservation organization that could buy it? Be willing to come up with solid alternatives that bring a winning outcome to all parties.
 - **Consider a Petition**, both online and on paper. Petitions rarely determine land use decisions by themselves, but they can demonstrate community interest and encourage broader public engagement.
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4. Appeal When Appropriate

- Appeal locally first. If a decision is made administratively (staff-level), you can typically appeal to the Hearings Officer or the Board of Commissioners before pursuing anything outside the county.
 - Appeal to LUBA. If you believe the county made a legal error, consult a land use attorney regarding an appeal to [Oregon's Land Use Board of Appeals \(LUBA\)](#). Appeals to LUBA are subject to strict deadlines—often 21 days after the final local decision—and generally require that issues were first raised during the local review process.
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5. Monitor Construction

Approval does not end public involvement.

Most developments must comply with conditions of approval.

Watch for issues such as:

- damaged tree protection fencing
- erosion control failures
- sediment entering streams
- construction outside approved limits
- removal of protected trees
- violations of permit conditions

Document concerns with photographs and report potential violations promptly to the appropriate agency.

6. Think Beyond One Project

Sometimes a proposed development fully complies with existing regulations. If so, stopping that project may not be legally possible. Instead, consider working toward long-term improvements such as:

- stronger tree protection ordinances
- improved riparian setbacks
- updated development standards
- Comprehensive Plan amendments
- Community Plan updates
- improved neighborhood design requirements

Many lasting improvements to neighborhood protections result from changes to local policy rather than opposition to a single development proposal.

7. Remember the Goal

Treekeepers supports responsible development that respects Washington County's existing tree canopy and natural resources.

The objective is not simply to stop development—it is to encourage development that preserves mature trees whenever reasonably possible, protects wildlife habitat, reduces heat, manages stormwater, and creates healthier neighborhoods for generations to come.

Success isn't always measured by stopping a project. Sometimes success means preserving twenty mature trees instead of five. Sometimes it means redesigning a road, protecting a stream, widening a buffer, planting larger replacement trees, or improving future county regulations. Even when a development proceeds, informed citizens can often make it substantially better for both current and future residents.

Note: This is general information, not legal advice. Deadlines in Oregon land use appeals are short and strictly enforced — consult a land use attorney or 1000 Friends of Oregon promptly if you intend to appeal.