



**Wasco County Planning Department**  
"Service, Sustainability & Solutions"

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## CONNECTIONS

Bridging the gap between community & planning

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### Disclaimer

**Issue: #7**

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### Director's Spotlight

In July, on separate weekends, a 3-day motorcycle rally called "Run 21" and indie music festival called "What the Festival" were held. While *Run 21* was a "truly bonafide old-school biker rally," *What the Festival* was part rave party, Woodstock, Burning Man, and Sasquatch Music Festival. Despite many people's assumptions, between the County's Land Use and Development Ordinance and the state's regulations, our department had no authority over either event. Nevertheless, we did play a role: we did our best to coordinate the event organizers with the sheriff, environmental health, road and fire districts. It was simply something we felt we could and should do to facilitate what planning circles call "social gatherings" or "outdoor mass gatherings."

As you might guess, as the big dates of the events came upon us, our department invariably fielded and received a range of questions, including "How and why did YOU people let this happen?" Interestingly, this particular one wasn't even a true question, but quickly evolved into a complaint for the event two weeks before it even started!

Now that the events are over, our department is frequently asked the how the events went and if we are going to create ordinances in the future to regulate them (quite frankly, we don't know). However, to answer, you've got to explore and understand the lessons learned. Here's what it was for our department: *Run 21* and *What The Festival* were big events that came upon a small rural community. They showcased the extremes to which one can define a community and served as case studies for how those within a respective community can react. As demonstrated by questions we received beforehand, the events understandably raised some serious apprehensions

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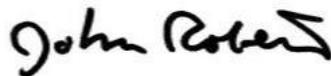
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among the local and long-time permanent community. However, over the course of three days, and as envisioned, the events created newfound, temporary communities of people, all of whom share in a common passion for being outdoors, rural Oregon, harmony, art, music and lots of self-expression. They crystallized the paradox and ultimate challenge of land-use planning and our department; defining what is in the best interest of the community.

Wasco County certainly has a lot of different and unique communities, all with competing values: orchardists, wheat farmers, organic farmers, retirees, veterans, permanent residents, second-home owners, river rafters, fishermen, motorcycle and road bikers, kite boarders, etc.. There will be more big events in the future that, because it's not our role, our department will not be able to regulate but which will affect different communities in the county. Our department tries to balance interests, embrace change and be respectful to all the different communities we serve. Within each community, it's our hope that other individuals out there will continue to do so, too, always remembering this Stephen Covey quote: "*A community's strength lies in differences, not in similarities.*"

Nevertheless, if you are unsure if a "*social gathering*" or "*outdoor mass gathering*" in the county is legal or needs permits, don't hesitate to contact us.

Please read this newsletter and anticipate getting your next one this winter.



John Roberts, AICP  
Planning Director

**FIRE SAFETY STANDARDS:  
AIMED TO PROTECT YOUR LIFE,  
PROPERTY AND RESOURCES**

The Government Flats Complex Fires that started in August southwest of The Dalles reminded residents of Wasco County that wildfire can be a dramatic and potentially dangerous risk. A threat to life, safety, property, and resources, fires can result in devastating losses to individuals, families, and businesses. The Government Flats Complex Fires and other blazes highlight the importance of the Fire Safety Standards applied by Wasco County.

The intent of the County's Fire Safety Standards is to keep your life, property, and resources safe! The Standards are designed to prevent the spread of wildfire in our valued rural areas. They apply in all zones, although the ways in which they apply may vary by zone and type of development.

Wasco County's Standards provide information and outline requirements for property owners undertaking development. The Standards are multi-pronged and address several components of property development. These components include siting structures on the land, building materials, building designs, and emergency access to structures. For example, the Standards outline how structures may be located in relation to steep slopes because wildfire typically travels uphill much faster than downhill. The Fire Safety Standards require a 50-foot buffer called a "Fire Fuel Break Area" around buildings to minimize tinder that spreads fire. This buffer is one in which ground cover is low, limbs are removed from trees from below 8 feet, and shrubs are located in isolated groups, among other criteria. Lastly, the Fire Safety Standards require that driveways provide adequate access for large emergency vehicles.

Many rural areas in Wasco County are not served by a fire protection district, including many properties in our Forest Zones. As a result, the Fire Safety Standards are especially important in rural or forested areas of Wasco County.

Links to forms and information:

You can review the complete Fire Safety Standards here <http://co.wasco.or.us/planning/WCOrd/Chapter10.pdf>

You can review the Fire Safety Self-Certification form required as part of development applications here: [http://co.wasco.or.us/planning/Planforms/FireSafety\\_Self-Certification.pdf](http://co.wasco.or.us/planning/Planforms/FireSafety_Self-Certification.pdf)

If you would like more information about fire safety, visit the "Fire Safety" page on our department's web page. It is here: [http://co.wasco.or.us/planning/Fire\\_links.html](http://co.wasco.or.us/planning/Fire_links.html)

**OUR WEBSITE AND APPLICATIONS ARE UPDATED!**

As identified in the Planning Department's [Strategic Plan](#) we continue to focus on improving our processes and operational efficiencies. Two projects that we identified were updating the Planning Department website and development application forms.

We are delighted to let everyone know that the new [Planning Department website](#) went live in May. Additionally, we updated our most commonly used development application forms. Staff put a lot of thought and hard work into these efforts. The results are a website and applications that are more organized, user-friendly, succinct and streamlined.

Nevertheless, if you have comments or concerns related to our website or applications, please forward them to us. You can help our efforts to continually evaluate and enhance the customer service we provide.

### IMPORTANT UPCOMING DATES

The Wasco County Planning Commission meets the first Tuesday of each month at the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center. The Planning Commission will not meet this October.

Please visit the [Planning Department website](#) for further details about the Commission.

### GOT A TOUGH QUESTION? ASK US!

If you have a question about anything in this newsletter, or if you have a general question about zoning, developing your property, floodplains or any other planning-related question, please let us help. You can send your questions to [wcpplanning@co.wasco.or.us](mailto:wcpplanning@co.wasco.or.us). We will research your question and help you find the answer.

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Please pass along this newsletter to anyone who may be interested in planning, land use and development in unincorporated portions of Wasco County. Archived editions of the newsletter will be posted to the Planning Department website. To subscribe to the newsletter, please click the "Join Our Mailing List!" button in the sidebar running down the left side of the newsletter.

**Sincerely,**

***The Wasco County Planning Department***