

## **Testimony for Planning Commission Work Session – West Linn Draft Waterfront Vision Plan**

**To:** Planning Commission (PC) Members

**From:** Russ Axelrod

**Date:** August 20, 2025

I've been traveling in Alaska the last few weeks with very limited time to prepare any comments for tonight's work session.

I'm here to stress the critically important role that each of you play as PC members for our community.

I understand this as I sat in your chair for @4 yrs before I spent 6 yrs as our Mayor.

I've not had the chance to read over the entire volume of materials that staff has stuffed into your agenda, but I must express my disappointment at the treatise of community comments displayed by our planning manager in his oversight role for the Working Group (WG) and in his distorted summation of some public comments in this plan development process.

As you know, many public comments submitted were not shared with WG members (in violation of the WG's own guidelines) and I know from personal discussion with some members that there was inadequate discussion and vetting of many issues, and no real consensus of the WG on the draft plan Mr. Wyss rushed to the PC.

I'm struck and disappointed by the treatise and belittling of issues summarized by Mr. Wyss – for example:

-- I raised the importance of explaining our City's and Coalition's joint National Heritage Area (NHA) goals for the Historic City Hall work and NHA region, and the response commented that because we are a State Heritage Area there's no need for clarifying language. Mr. Wyss should know that these are very different programs, goals, and issues, and it appears he does not know the differences or doesn't care to address them as simply requested?

-- I have repeatedly pointed out the direct conflict between the dense housing development the City prefers for the principal wetland in the Ponds District, and the environmental stewardship vision the community overwhelmingly desires that is reflected in the plan framework for the District. Mr. Wyss's response is that housing has always been in earlier development plans so the proposal is consistent with City plans so no need to change them – thus ignoring the very purpose of the community's vision plan for the future.

-- I commented that the plan should be clear about any future casino development for the waterfront area given the uncertainty of an important large waterfront area being committed to a newly visioned Columbia Basin Tribes organization (Willamette Falls Trust) where no actual project information or future plans have been provided or vetted in the community. Mr. Wyss dismissed the comment as being a state or federal matter, but that's at the root of my concern or point - that West Linn could lose control of our city planning if we don't have clear planning parameters established – something I believe is worth discussing and resolving.

-- I pointed out the direct conflict between the City's (dated) housing development plan for the wetland in the Ponds District and the environmental goals/vision for the District as well as the environmental protections codified in our Comprehensive Plan – all overwhelmingly supported by our community. Mr Wyss response is that housing in the wetland can be done and we have other codes to control things. For those like me that have been following such issues you would know that there are holes in our environmental code that staff

have taken advantage of to get around appropriate environmental protections – including code items on your PC docket that staff have not allowed the PC to address and correct. If these are not corrected, it remains possible for inappropriate development to bypass environmental protections the community overwhelmingly supports.

And the list goes on.....

I'm tired of this inappropriate treatment and dismissal of public comments, especially when they reflect the clear majority of community sentiment.

The waterfront plan is supposed to correct for this area past City planning maps and mistakes we have made the last 20-50 years - mistakes that destroyed a majority of our environmentally sensitive lands. We need to stop doing this and be better stewards of our environmental landscape and community interests!

As PC members your role is to ensure that our city's development and plans and this waterfront vision plan reflects the majority of our community members goals and aspirations, which are largely also detailed in our Comprehensive Plan.

The most critical remaining issue reflected in the current draft waterfront vision plan is **the City's non-sensical depiction of dense housing as an acceptable land use to be placed in our City's most significant remaining wetland.** If you do nothing else, **take the dense housing depiction off the map and out of our waterfront plan!** Thus, our housing developments should occur at other appropriate locations.

This is not only the overwhelming desire of the community reflected in the vision plan framework for the Ponds District, removing it is supported by clear criteria and direction outlined by the community in our Comprehensive Plan that is supposed to also guide your planning decisions as PC members – see for example the following:

Goal 5, Section 2 Natural Resources – Goals 1, 2, and 3, and Policy's 6, 10, 11, 12, 15 and 16.

Goal 6, Section 2 Water Resources – Principal Goal: to *"Maintain or improve the quality of West Linn's water resources."*

Goal 7, Areas Subject to Natural Disasters and Hazards - Principal Goal: to *"Protect life and property from flood, earthquake, other geological hazards, and terrorist threats or attacks,"* and Policy's 1, 6, 8 and 9.

Goal 8 – Urbanization - Principal Goal: to *"Promote an orderly growth pattern within the UGB to preserve and enhance the natural and developed character of West Linn."*

As PC members of our community, I urge you to show good faith stewardship in your decision-making. Take the time necessary to adjust the draft waterfront plan and uphold your duty to support our community development as community members have overwhelmingly requested.

Respectfully,

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**COMMENTS REGARDING THE WEST LINN WATERFRONT VISION PLAN  
Planning Commission Meeting August 20, 2025**

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**Tonight, I would like to focus on the nature of the Community Engagement Survey, specifically as it relates to the Scientific Method.**

**At the July 16 PC meeting, myself and other commenters, raised many issues regarding the deficiencies of the West Linn Waterfront Vision Plan. As several of us testified, the issue of the use of double-barreled questions in the Vision Plan survey was most concerning. Darren Wyss countered the argument that the survey used double-barreled questions. His response was "The final survey was intended to gauge support for the Vision Plan, not be scientifically valid as it was self-selecting." Notice that he used the term "support for the Vision Plan," as if that was the only option.**

**First, let's look at his term "scientifically valid."**

**Gathering accurate input, or exact measurements, is the core of the scientific method. And if the goal of a survey is to get accurate input, then questions must be designed as such. A single question that requires an answer based on a single issue.**

**But a survey that is intended to gather data upon which important decisions are to be made, should be conducted in a manner designed to collect accurate measurements. Hence the need to use the scientific method.**

**The Nevada Center for Surveys, Evaluation and Statistics (CSES) states, "public comment surveys can benefit from using the scientific method as it helps ensure that the research is conducted in a fair, unbiased, and repeatable manner, allowing for valid conclusions to be drawn from the data collected. This approach minimizes observer bias and enhances the reliability of the findings."**

**And this from the University of Kentucky, Survey Research Center: "Scientific public opinion polling is the only way to truly understand your community's views, regardless of how big your community is or where it's located. When your group is proud of the scientific data, your community will trust the results."**

**Now let's look at "self-selecting."**

**In order to get the most input on a community survey, it is probably best to broadcast it to the entire community rather than conduct a random sample survey. Granted, a self-selecting**

**survey may contain bias, because those who respond are usually motivated and genuinely interested in the issue, as opposed to a random sample survey that may get responses from a representative group of the community who may not share the same interest.**

**But wouldn't the opinions of people genuinely interested or educated in an issue, be desired?**

### **Community Engagement Summary**

**In spite of flawed survey methods, the public comment results were overwhelmingly in favor of creating Parks and Recreation Spaces. Please refer to Table 4, Ponds District Ranking of Preferences on P. 17 of the Community Engagement Summary of the WL Waterfront Vision Plan.**

**Yet the city's interpretation of the results was just the opposite and the area in question was labeled as medium-density residential. Why?**

**If the city is to regain any sense of professionalism in the area of planning, then it must conduct studies and surveys in a professional manner. If not, then the city will continue to be viewed as an entity that is dysfunctional and devoid of any sense of environmental and social stewardship.**

**Therefore, it is the responsibility of this body to ensure that all necessary data is collected properly, and that community input is valued as an important part of any planning process. I greatly appreciate your efforts in volunteering your time to ensure that not only the needs and desires of the community are met, but also that the regulations and codes of the city are upheld.**