

OREGON TOURISM COMMISSION MEETING

September 12, 2025

Yachats Commons
441 Hwy 101 N,
Yachats, OR 97498

Tourism Commissioners present included: Chair Willitts, Vice Chair Patel and Commissioners David Gremmels, Travis Hill, Lucinda DiNovo, Jenifer Roe, David Penilton, and Scott Youngblood.

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Willitts opens the meeting at 9:00 a.m. and welcomes everyone to the September 12, 2025, Oregon Tourism Commission meeting.

Chair Willitts thanks everyone for being in Yachats, noting that the meeting materials, including the agenda and supplemental materials can be found on the Travel Oregon Industry website.

Chair Willitts states that in holding a meeting today, all Public Meeting notice requirements required by state law were met.

The Oregon Tourism Commissioners and Todd Davidson, CEO of Travel Oregon, introduce themselves.

Chair Willitts states that there will be an opportunity to hear comments from partners. Those who plan to share remarks shall use the sign-in sheet.

Department of Justice representative Sylvia Cramond introduces herself.

Commissioner Gremmels shares about a recent personal trip that coincided with the Travel Oregon activation at the Royal Horticultural Show in Richmond, England, and how it showcased the best of Oregon, including its gardens and flowers, to potential visitors.

Chair Remarks

Chair Willitts acknowledges Commissioner DiNovo for following through on the request to have the Travel Oregon DOJ representative attend Commission meetings through the CEO search process.

Local Welcome

Chair Willitts welcomes Marcus Hinz, Executive Director at the Oregon Coast Visitors Association, Bobbi Price, Yachats City Manager, and Mayor Craig Berdie, Mayor of Yachats, to join us today.

Marcus, Bobbi and Mayor Berdie walk the Commission through a PowerPoint presentation for the local welcome (Exhibit A):



- Welcome to Yachats
- Promotional Video
- Visit Yachats
- Yachats Area Trolley
- Estuary Walkway Project
- Little Log Church Museum
- Indigenous History
- Property Purchases
- Environmental Investments
- Tourism Infrastructure
- Mayor's Vision
- Oregon Coast Visitors Association
- Ride the Dirt Wave
- North Coast Express
- Oregon Coast Trail Foundation

Commissioner Penilton asks if the Yachats trolley is operated by the city. Bobbi answers that First Student will operate the trolley, providing some summer work for their drivers.

Commissioner Penilton asks if the estuary walkway will be connected to the 804 trail. Bobbi answers that the walkway trail will be connected to the 804 trail to make it continuous.

Commissioner Penilton comments on the opportunities for birding in the area.

Commissioner Youngblood comments on workforce housing and asks if Mayor Berdie knows the percentage of homes that are short term rentals or second homes. Mayor Berdie answers that 60% of the homes are second homes. 15% of the homes in Yachats have vacation rental licenses. Bobbi answers that a cap of 125 homes are allowed to carry vacation rental licenses.

Commissioner Hill asks the utilization rate of the North Coast Express. Marcus answers that the ridership was low in the pilot year. The second year will focus on increasing ridership and the third year will focus on self sufficient funding.

Commissioner Penilton asks how many people have taken the North Coast Express and what the goal is for three years. Marcus answers that ridership was below 400 people. The plan is to pass off the transportation plan to a private business. Second year goal is multiple thousands of users.

Vice Chair Patel asks in how many days the 400 riders participated. Marcus answers that the bus operated Friday, Saturday, and Sunday throughout the summer.

Commissioner DiNovo appreciates the work across the coast to continue to develop visitor resources.

Commissioner Penilton asks the location of the North Coast Express pick up location in the Portland area. Marcus answers that the bus started at the Sunset Transit Center in Beaverton where the MAX lines, bus

lines, park n ride, and private shuttles all converge. Commissioner Penilton asks if research has been done to look at alternative locations such as downtown Portland or the Portland International Airport. Marcus answers that considerations were taken to make the location as convenient and effective as possible.

Commissioner Roe appreciates the Mayor's Vision and how it positively impacts residents and visitors. She asks if the North Coast Express is bike friendly. Marcus answers that the coach was equipped for bikes, but he does not know if it was utilized. The Yachats trolley is fully accessible for wheelchairs.

Chair Willitts thanks the presenters.

Partners and Public Statements

Chair Willitts states that on Thursday, August 28, the Commission meeting notice was posted to the Commission Meetings webpage, notice was sent through Industry Communications and a link to the meeting agendas was posted.

Chair Willitts reminds the group that the public comment period is an invitation to the industry to inform the Commission of updates, information, and constructive thoughts about Oregon's tourism industry. He reminds attendees that a comment form lives continuously on the industry website.

The Commission received zero comments in advance of the meeting.

Chair Willitts states that we have the opportunity for attendees to sign up in-person to speak with us. He requests that remarks remain respectful and professional and ask that comments be limited to 3 minutes.

No one signed up to comment.

Commission Business

Review of Commission Packet

Chair Willitts asks if all Commissioners have received and had a chance to review their Commission packet – including the financials. All commissioners answer affirmatively.

Financial Update

Chair Willitts thanks Vice Chair Patel, Todd, Edward Van Buren, Louna Agoro, Junho Chang, and Commissioners Hill and Roe for reviewing the financials prior to this meeting.

Vice Chair Patel shares the financials including the September TLT deposit. With the September deposit, Travel Oregon has received \$10.49M in TLT revenue, which represents 24.5% of the budgeted \$42.8M. Fiscal year-to-date TLT is up 8% compared to FY25. TLT revenue is closely monitored, but this quarter's result is consistent with past performance and supports steady early-year growth.

CEO Search Update

Chair Willitts shares that the CEO search process continues to move forward in alignment with the state's best practices and a deliberate and thoughtful approach to hiring. Kari Westlund has been very helpful

keeping the search focused and will continue to support our work during this period of transition, including leading initial staff engagement and a review of commission policy, governance and agency succession planning. An Intermediate Request for Proposals (RFP) was recently issued to a variety of qualified executive search firms that will ensure we have the right partner to assist us in this recruitment. In addition, last week the Governor submitted two new appointments for our commission to the Senate for confirmation.

Commission Action

Approval of Minutes (June and July 2025)

Chair Willitts shares that Commissioners were sent the draft June and July 2025 Commission meeting minutes via email on August 28 and asks if there are any questions or comments regarding these documents.

Chair Willitts takes a motion for approval.

- Commissioner DiNovo moves to approve and Commissioner Gremmels seconds the motion.
- Chair Willitts asks that all in favor say 'aye'. Commissioners Hill, Youngblood, Roe, Gremmels, DiNovo, Penilton, Vice Chair Patel, and Chair Willitts say 'aye'.
- Chair Willitts asks for any opposition.
- Hearing none, the motion carries.

The June and July 2025 Commission meeting minutes are approved and will be posted to the Commission Section of the Travel Oregon Industry website.

Chair Willitts recesses the meeting at 10:05 a.m.

Chair Willitts reconvenes the meeting at 10:21 a.m.

Chair Willitts welcomes Drew Roslund, Owner of the Overleaf Lodge and Fireside Motel of Yachats, to share about workforce housing. Drew shares how the pandemic affected his staff's housing opportunities and how he worked with the City of Yachats to provide conditional housing dependent upon their employment.

Vice Chair Patel asks how quickly the individual needs to vacate the housing once their employment ends. Drew answers 24 hours.

Competitive Grant Update

Todd states that the first report today comes from Michelle Woodard, Director of Stewardship Investments, and Deb Vaughn, Grants Manager.

Michelle and Deb walk the Commission through a PowerPoint presentation regarding updates to the Competitive Grants programs (Exhibit B) including:

- Our Values
- Competitive Grants Program Cycle Map
- 2026-2027 Cycle Timeline
- Commission Engagement

- Broader Engagement
- Learnings that Guide Us: Statutory Language
- Learnings that Guide Us: Tourism Industry Partner Survey
- Learnings that Guide Us: Destination Needs Survey
- Commission Discussion Questions

Vice Chair Patel asks how success will be measured. Deb answers that the grant guidelines would answer what successful projects would look like by working with the Strategy, Research and Analytics team to identify Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that align with the 10-Year Strategic Vision.

Vice Chair Patel asks how the Investments team would address if a grantee was not fulfilling their grant project after being granted funds. Deb answers that the program functions on a reimbursement structure with a portion of the funds being allocated upfront and additional funds are allocated as the grantee is successful with checkpoints with the Investments team.

Commission Penilton advocates to continue to function with a diversity, equity and inclusion lens.

Commission DiNovo advocates to align with the 10-Year Strategic Vision and for projects to touch multiple regions. She then asks about the possibility for matching funds. Deb answers that matching funds will be considered.

Commissioner Roe asks how the Investment team will aid smaller and rural organizations to be competitive applicants. Deb answers that the Investments team will be available for outreach with interested applicants and consider how smaller communities could partner together to strengthen their impact. Michelle answers that the act of supporting smaller communities will strengthen their applications for future grant cycles if this current cycle is not the best fit.

Commissioner DiNovo advocates that the smaller grant cycles do not require matching funds but that the large grant cycle include considering matching funds.

Commissioner Gremmels asks if the December training for Commissioners can include conversations about the Commission's role in the grant process.

Commissioner Hill states he recently submitted a video application for some work in Roseburg and asks if that might be possible. Deb answers that South Dakota Arts and Tourism recently shifted to video applications and they saw an uptick in applications from tribal entities.

Commissioner Youngblood echoes the sentiments to support diversity, equity and inclusion. He continues to share that he supports a multi-region consideration such as an increase in international visitation. He supports Commission engagement in the grant process.

Commissioner Penilton advocates to support international visitation especially given the decrease in Canadian visitors.

Chair Willitts supports projects that touch the entire state. He states that Commissioners are interested in being engaged in the grant process.

Todd shares that additional feedback can be shared with Matt Finn to then route it to the Investments team.

Todd thanks the presenters.

2023-25 Biennial Plan Lookback Report

Todd states that the next update will come from Petra Hackworth, VP of Insights and Impact, and Hannah Hicks, Strategy Manager.

Petra and Hannah provide the Commission with a PowerPoint presentation regarding the 2023-25 Biennial Lookback Report (Exhibit C) including:

- What is the 2023-2025 Biennial Lookback Report?
- 10-Year Vision Journey: 3.5 Biennial Plans Left
- Strategic Action Planning & Execution Process
- 23-25 Strategies: Action Plan Selection Criteria
- 23-25 Strategies by Objective
- Strategic Wins – Economy
 - Advance Perception of Tourism Value
 - Advance Perception of Tourism Value Wins
- Strategic Wins – Experiences
 - Attract and Retain Tourism Workforce
 - Attract and Retain Tourism Workforce Wins
 - Assist Communities in Crisis
 - Assist Communities in Crisis Wins
 - Expand Destination Management Engagement & Reduce High Visitation Pressures
 - Expand Destination Management Engagement & Reduce High Visitation Pressures Wins
 - Support Development of Experiences for Underserved Communities
 - Support Development of Experiences for Underserved Communities Wins
- Strategic Wins – Equity
 - Elevate Voices of Underserved Communities
 - Elevate Voices of Underserved Communities Wins
 - Integrate DEI Agencywide
 - Integrate DEI Agencywide Wins
- Nest Steps: 2023-25 Strategies
- Key Learnings: 2023-25 Biennium
- KPI Goal Progress
- 10-Year Strategic Vision KPI Dashboard
- KPI Update: Oregon's Tourism Economy
- KPI Update: Resident Sentiment
- KPI Update: Visitor Sentiment

- 2025-27 Selected Strategies

Todd thanks the presenters and asks if there are any questions.

Commissioner Youngblood thanks the presenters, especially Hannah for her diligence and collaboration.

Commissioner DiNovo appreciates the opportunity to pause and look back and see the economic development at work.

Commissioner Hill asks if the 0.9% was down from goals or down from previous measurement. Hannah clarifies that it's not a percentage but rather a measurement of resident sentiment from -3 to 3 and the goal is one (current measurement is at 0.9).

Commissioner Penilton appreciates the support of younger staff presenters such as Hannah.

Todd thanks the presenters.

Other Business

Chair Willitts thanks the local hosts for their hospitality.

Chair Willitts shares appreciation for former Chair DiNovo and her commitment to the Commission. Commissioner DiNovo reflects on her tenure as Chair and how it honors her late husband's legacy. Commissioner Penilton and Vice Chair Patel share their appreciation of Commissioner DiNovo.

Chair Willitts shares gratitude for Erin Stephenson for her four years on the Commission.

Chair Willitts shares gratitude for Commissioner Scott Youngblood as today's meeting marks the end of his tenure on the Commission. Chair Willitts thanks Commissioner Youngblood for his service, dedication and leadership.

Vice Chair Patel appreciates the candor and service of Commissioner Youngblood. Commissioner Penilton appreciates the work of Commissioner Youngblood within and outside of the Commission. Commissioner Hill marks the dedication of service by Commissioner Youngblood. Commissioner DiNovo marks the hours and practices of Commissioner Youngblood and how they have left a legacy to the Commission.

Commissioner Youngblood reflects on the opportunity to serve on the Commission and continues to advocate for tourism as an economic engine. A recent op-ed by Greater Portland Inc.'s Monique Claiborne is mentioned as an article that articulates the importance of tourism to the state.

The next Oregon Tourism Commission meeting will be December 3 in the Willamette Valley. More information will be posted to the industry website as soon as it's available.

Chair Willitts adjourns the meeting at 12:03 p.m.