

AOC

Association of Oregon Counties

For more than a century the Association of Oregon Counties have been dedicated to improving the ability of county government to serve Oregonians.



This photo is from an AOC meeting on August 10, 2014. Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde (center) speaks in a morning break-out discussion with members of AOC's Energy, Environment and Land Use Steering Committee, with Executive Director Mike McArthur, (far right) & Vernonia High School student Brandon Clapshaw.

Photos and Story: RANDY SANDERS

WHO IS AOC?

On Monday morning, August 10, I traveled from St. Helens to Salem to observe AOC's all-day meeting. Columbia County Board of Commissioners Chairman, Tony Hyde was there in attendance representing our county.

I walked away fascinated by the meeting and how elected leaders from across the state came together in the spirit of all Oregonians. Why don't more Oregonians understand who AOC is and the valuable resource they provide? This propelled me to

use a weekly installment of “Conversations” to try and explain how it works.

The Association of Oregon Counties is a 108-year-old organization who provides an ongoing forum for Oregon county government leaders to come together for the purpose of sharing ideas and building a consensus for the good of all Oregonians.

AOC is governed by elected officers and a Board of Directors who manage their staff. The officers and the Board maintain a schedule of regular meetings, while the Legislative Committee meets during Oregon’s legislative sessions.

All 36 Oregon counties are members of AOC and divided up into eight geographic districts. These meetings are instrumental for idea exchange between each county’s elected commissioners.

Headquartered in Salem, AOC is staffed with talented, educated and experienced professionals who bring an array of skill sets together under the umbrella of one organization.

AOC’s professional staff members deliver proficient skills to Oregon’s elected and appointed county officials. These skills include: public lands, natural resources, renewable energy, environment and sustainability, web support, labor relations, legal, transportation, land use planning, telecommunications, public safety, communications and media relations, fiscal services and much more.



AOC’s current president is Columbia County Commissioner Earl Fisher.

Photo: AOC

One way to look at how AOC functions, is to imagine them as a powerful support staff who work to scope out the landscape, identify the trends, provide statistics and produce pertinent information so they may prepare Oregon's county commissioners to make educated decisions.



Four Columbia County Commissioners have served as AOC Presidents within the past 100-years. They include the current President Earl Fisher, Tony Hyde (above: 2003), Mike Sykes (1993) and John Whipple (1963).

AOC resembles any other well-heeled staff who represents a congressional, senatorial or presidential administration.

Almost all elected county commissioners don't have the luxury of hiring their own professional, skilled support staff, but even if they could, it would be challenging to constantly be to be vetting and hiring enough talented people every time a new commissioner is elected. Being able to fill enough staff positions in every Oregon county would be another concern.

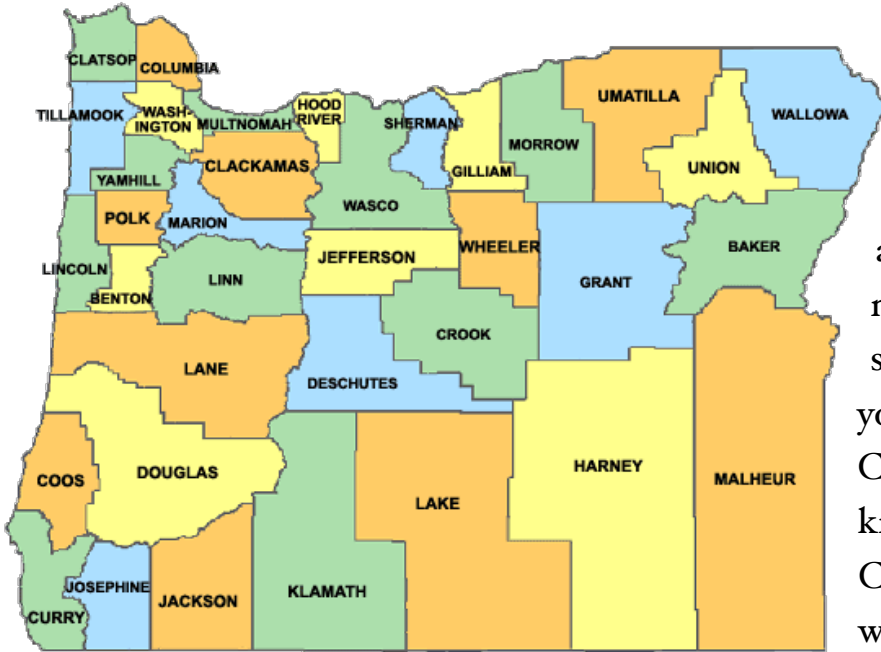
Another reason AOC is valuable, is because it brings neighboring counties together so they may explore new challenges together. It just makes fiscal and pragmatic sense to absorb AOC's precious resource.

AOC provides two other important tasks: The County Road Program and County College.

The County Road Program — established in 1990 — started as a coop between the Oregon Association of County Engineers and Surveyors. AOC works to

enhance county road department by using management programs and technical assistance.

County College prepares recently elected officials with the knowledge they'll need to succeed in office.



Imagine that you've been running a successful business, or you've been a successful farmer or maybe a school teacher, ect. You've never held public office, but several folks have approached you to run for County Commission. Before you know it, you've won! Congratulations, but now, what?

Having no experience in local government never disqualifies any passionate soul from succeeding, but without the proper knowledge, you're not serving your constituents and you could be setting yourself up for failure. Constituents deserve a well-rounded leader who is not learning the job by trial and error; that's where AOC can help.

AOC offers a one-year program, every other year, following the general election. In partnership with Oregon State University, County College is aimed at newly elected commissioners and judges, but open to staff as space permits.



Current AOC President,
Columbia County
Commissioner Earl Fisher
leads a group discussion in a
spring AOC meeting staged
in St. Helens.

Topics covered in County College include: community development, infrastructure and public works, finance, human services, public safety, Oregon's educational system, leadership and management.

Learning from AOC provides new leaders with the knowledge needed to start making the important decisions that constituents elected you for and connects

you with other colleagues throughout the state, thus initiating the valuable professional relationships that will help navigate you throughout your career in local government.

AOC's goals are to help elected officials to: "better understand your responsibilities and legal obligations as a commissioner or judge," and "reduced risk and liability for you and your county."

To learn more about the
Association of Oregon Counties,
visit their website at:

[http://www.aocweb.org/aoc/
Home/tabid/38/Default.aspx](http://www.aocweb.org/aoc/Home/tabid/38/Default.aspx)

You can also call them at:
503.585.8351

