



**COLUMBIA  
ECONOMIC  
TEAM**

**Semi-Annual Update**  
**St Helens City Council**

Wednesday October 15, 2025  
Paul Vogel, Executive Director



# Columbia Economic Team Core Functions & Structure



**COLUMBIA  
ECONOMIC  
TEAM**

## Columbia Economic Team (CET)

**Purpose:** CET's mission is to promote the creation, retention, growth, and attraction of business and industry throughout Columbia County.

### Private & Public Membership Supported

- Business recruitment, retention, and expansion
- Advocacy: Investment, public funding/grants, business, organizations, policy, programming, issues, regulatory & permitting
- Collaborator, Convener, Facilitator: Business, government, non-profits, communities
- Small Business Program & Enterprise Zone Manager



### Columbia County Small Business Resource Center

**Free, confidential, 1-on-1  
business advising on:**

- Business & marketing plans
- Financial strategy & capital
- Hiring & managing teams
- Navigating regulations
- Cash flow
- Starting up, launching, growth, and exit planning
- and much more!

The center also provides:

- Resource Connection
- Educational classes



### Keep it Local Columbia County

**Purpose:** Bolster the local economy by persuading residents and visitors to shop, taste, play, and choose local first.

- Robust and FREE online directory + mobile app
- Social media & newsletter promotions
- Seasonal programs
- Paid business marketing & sponsorships opportunities (optional)



### GRO Greater

**Purpose:** To connect entrepreneurs to the right resources at the right time. Funded by the Ford Family Foundation.

- Resource and asset mapping
- GRO Navigator connects with founders, resources, assets & opportunities
- Facilitates small business loans up to \$50k
- Coordination with CET business programs and initiatives



### Tourism

Destination Management  
Organization Designated by  
Travel Oregon

**Purpose:** Promote and cultivate Columbia County as a visitor destination by leveraging and enhancing resources and assets.

- Strategic planning
- Branding & advocacy
- Destination development
- Promoting recreational and hospitality assets
- Funding advocate & facilitator
- Partnership: local, regional & state



# ACTIVE & PENDING RECRUITMENT/EXPANSION PROJECTS



## **Project Spice - Scappoose**

Aviation Advanced Manufacturing

250 jobs | \$700m investment | 27 month development



## **RestorCap - St Helens (Armstrong Site)**

Redevelopment Project

Job count, tenants & activity TBS - 14 months development



## **Project Arcadia - St Helens Mill Site**

Forest Products & Paper

125+ jobs | 12 months development



## **NXT Clean Energy - Clatskanie/ Port Westward**

Renewable Diesel & SAS/Aircraft Fuels

258 jobs | \$2.9b investment | 8+ years development



## **Scion Lumber- Clatskanie**

Specialty Forest Products

135+/- jobs | \$28m investment | 16 month timeline



## **Cascade Tissue Property - Scappoose**

Available Industrial Property

\$40+m investment closed after 5 years | 287K sf plus  
15 acres available





# ENERGY.....around ENERGY

## Throughout all recruitment, Energy is at the forefront....

- ▶ Smallest to largest recruitment or expansion....MUST have energy, especially natural gas and electricity
- ▶ Nation and Oregon are electric system constrained; Columbia County/NW region constrained as well
- ▶ All our utilities are doing extensive planning work
- ▶ Countywide, community, land & business owner, policy & political support is essential
- ▶ **Two business Oregon Grants:**
  - Kaster/St. Helens Industrial Park Substation
  - Transmission & Load Planning Community Task Force





# Tourism Updates



**COLUMBIA  
COUNTY**

Your Place of Wander







# COLUMBIA COUNTY

Your Place of Wander

- December 2024 Travel Oregon Commission Meeting
- OTLA 5 Year Reunion
- Sponsored Governor's Tourism Conference Workshop
- April 2025 Travel Oregon Commission Meeting



# \$381,600 in Travel Oregon Grants

- \$100,000: Port of Columbia County
  - Scappoose Bay Marina
- \$100,000: City of St. Helens
  - Riverfront walkway
- \$100,000: St. Helens Main Street/Klondike
  - Elevator
- \$81,600: Clatskanie Chamber
  - Downtown ADA Improvements





# 2024-2025 Strategic Investment



St. Helen Main Street  
\$41,144  
“Your Downtown”

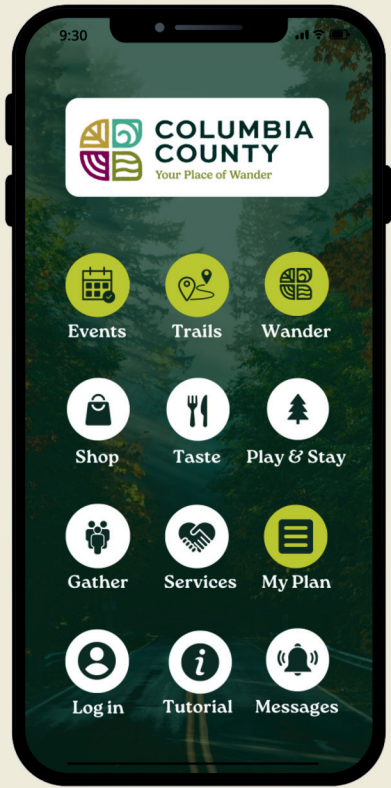




## Underway:

- Value of Tourism Campaign
- Photography Library
- Travel Oregon Recreation Ready Summit
- OTLA - St. Helens candidates
- Upcoming Strategic Investment Grant (\$40,388)
- Upcoming Competitive Grants





/wander\_columbia



/WanderColumbiaCounty





# SMALL BUSINESS



**GRO**  
**GREATER**







# A New Chapter, Same Dedication

**On July 1, 2025, we proudly transitioned from the Columbia County SBDC to the Columbia County Small Business Resource Center (SBRC).**

- ▶ Same trusted services, expanded flexibility, more local control.
- ▶ Same local team and community-driven mission
- ▶ More responsive, nimble, and equity-minded



# 2024-2025 BY THE NUMBERS

- **480 total advising hours** delivered across our service area
- **4.96 average advising hours per client**
  - deep, relationship-based support
- **16 new business starts** supported through advising and navigation
- **2024: 130 new clients** onboarded
- **2025 (to date): 125+ new clients** already served

## 2025 GOALS



**150 Clients  
Served by  
year end**



**40+ clients  
5hrs+ of  
advising**



**Track Key  
Outcomes**

(capital formation, new business starts, jobs created/retained)

# OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

- **Over 350 small business clients** served
- Hosted **26 workshops, Munch-N-Learns & classes** between 2024-2025
- **Accessed 4 part-time advisors** to expand expertise
- Delivered consistent, **high-touch 1:1 advising** and support
- **Expanded guidance** for marketing, permitting, capital access, and workforce development
- **Hosted the first-ever Columbia County Small Business Resource Fair**, connecting entrepreneurs to critical tools, advisors, and community partners

## SINCE LAUNCH



**350+  
Clients**



**50+  
Classes Held**



**Held 3  
Special Events**



# WHAT'S NEW? WHAT'S NEXT?

Our goal: Less red tape. More impact. Stronger local economy.

- ▶ Innovation Hub - Regional and expanded partnerships
- ▶ USDA funded sector and peer cohorts
- ▶ Exploring new alternatives and rural/local oriented funding sources to support deeper service

## Deepen Relationships With

- Business Oregon
- Oregon Entrepreneurs Network (OEN)
- Xcelerate Women
- Reinventing Rural
- Local lenders & institutions





# Columbia County SBRC

## Recent and Upcoming Programs....

- ▶ **Munch N Learn:** AI for Business classes (August) and Budgeting for Businesses (September)
- ▶ **Munch N Learn:** How To Use Quickbooks Online in Vernonia, St Helens and via Zoom on Thursday, October 16th
- ▶ **Co.Starters Business Bootcamp Launch**
  - November 21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> ( St Helens)
- ▶ Chrissy and Jason completed training through FINSYNC and are **Co.Starters Certified Facilitators**





# WHERE TO POINT PEOPLE TO?



[columbiaeconomicteam.com/grow/sbrc/](https://columbiaeconomicteam.com/grow/sbrc/)



# GRO GREATER

GROWING RURAL OREGON: ENTREPRENEUR-LED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



**Connecting entrepreneurs to the right resources at the right time**

- ▶ Powered by: Columbia Economic Team (CET) with funding from The Ford Family Foundation
- ▶ Supporting Partners: e2 National Resource Network & Community LendingWorks



COLUMBIA  
ECONOMIC  
TEAM



community  
LendingWorks





# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## CAPITAL, CAPACITY & COLLABORATION

- ▶ **\$30,000 in GRO Technical Assistance Grants (TAG)** distributed to Columbia County businesses. Most services delivered by **local TA providers**.
- ▶ **13 GRO Loans facilitated**, delivering over **\$700,000** in direct funding for business growth
- ▶ Facilitated and delivered **5 eCommerce classes**, now available as digital asset and resource on Youtube
- ▶ Continued support of entrepreneurs through navigation, meaningful meetups, and coordinated outreach, connecting.
- ▶ Metrics-driven approach supporting capital access, job creation & long-term planning – for the innovative and driven entrepreneur



# WHAT'S NEW? WHAT'S NEXT?

## The Road Ahead: Year 3 Activation & Impact

- ▶ Year 3 funding approved! Thanks to a strong track record and measurable impact
- ▶ Short pause in June/July to submit Year 2 Report, Year 3 application and evaluate progress
- ▶ GRO Navigation Team reactivating this quarter. More outreach, deeper engagement, & expanded resource navigation
- ▶ **Continuing to build a sustainable, entrepreneur-led ecosystem in Columbia County**







# KEEP IT LOCAL COLUMBIA COUNTY

**Encouraging people to shop, taste, play, and choose local first.**

**We do this through:**

- ▶ Social Media & Digital Marketing
- ▶ Columbia County's largest Online Directory / Mobile App
- ▶ Promotions & Seasonal Campaigns





# WHAT'S NEW? WHAT'S NEXT?

- ▶ Launch the “Breakthrough” Podcast
- ▶ Launch a countywide e-gift card program
- ▶ Grow the directory 40%, to at least 1000 listings

**Don't forget to download the  
Columbia County Mobile App!**





# WHAT'S UNDERWAY



**Sign Up!**  
FOR  
**Keep it Local  
For the Holidays**

**DUE WEDNESDAY  
NOVEMBER  
5TH.**

**THE WONDERLAND CARD**  
NOV. 14TH - JAN 7TH  
For every \$10 a customer spends at your business, they get a stamp on their card for a chance to win \$3000 and 30+ prizes!

**THE BIGFOOT TRAIL**  
NOV. 14TH - JAN 7TH  
Bigfoot is shopping local in the county! Hide a footprint in your business for customers to find.

**NEW! KEEP IT LOCAL E-GIFT CARD**  
NOV. 14TH-NOV 2026  
Customers can purchase an e-gift card and email it to others to spend at participating businesses year-round. If your POS system accepts Master Card manual entries and/or Apple/Google Pay, You're good to sign up!

Contact Sierra to learn more [sierra@columbiacountyoregon.com](mailto:sierra@columbiacountyoregon.com)



**I Will Be Vending at the**  
*The Columbia County*  
**Small Business  
Saturday Bazaar!**

**SAT. NOVEMBER 30TH, 9-4PM** | **AT THE JOHN GUMM BUILDING**  
**251 ST HELENS ST, ST HELENS OR**

- SHOP LOCALLY MADE ITEMS
- SEE THE NEWLY RESTORED BUILDING
- TAKE PHOTOS WITH SANTA FOR FREE, 11AM-2PM
- JOIN THE COMMUNITY COOKIE BAKE-OFF
- CRAFT & MAIL CARDS TO THE NORTH POLE
- AND MUCH MORE!



# THE BRE PROJECT

**The Columbia County Business Community Connection (BRE) Project combines a proven model, direct interviews, data analysis, and collaboration to create an informed, shared vision for future business development in the county.**

- 1** Support, retain, & grow local businesses based on *their* needs (through data collection)
- 2** Strengthen partnerships & collaboration within the ecosystem
- 3** Establish & implement a shared countywide Economic Vision & CET Strategic Plan





# UNDERWAY

## IMPLEMENTATION

### 4 ACTION PRIORITIES:

1. Workforce & Education
2. User-Friendly Regulatory/  
Permitting Processes
3. Communication &  
Collaboration
4. Downtown Revitalization





# LOOKING FORWARD...



## Begin Execution of CET Strategic Plan

- Board Approval 9/2025
- Membership and Board composition and other priority tasks; timeline



## Year 3 Execution GRO Greater



## Sustain & Grow

- **BRE** – Business Community Connection execution
- Small Business Resource Center/Programs
- Keep it Local
- GRO



## Multiple Major Grant Submissions



Business Oregon - Innovation Hub



USDA Grant



- TAP Grant for Underrepresented Businesses
- OCF Thriving Entrepreneurs Grant
- ROI
- OnPoint CU Economic Opportunity Grant



## Consistently strengthen and leverage regional and statewide relationships



## CET/ Regional Tourism Capacity Expansion



## Workforce Coordination



# Opportunities & Challenges



## Opportunities

- ▶ Largest concentration of buildable, industrial employment lands in/adjacent to metro area
- ▶ Elevated market awareness
- ▶ Elevated State awareness
- ▶ OMIC R&D, and PCC/OMIC Training Center



## Challenges

- ▶ Oregon ranked 39<sup>th</sup> nationally in Business Friendliness
- ▶ Oregon ranked 30<sup>th</sup> in tax competitiveness
- ▶ Oregon ranked 45<sup>th</sup> in manufacturing growth
- ▶ Housing
- ▶ National economy
- ▶ Tariff uncertainty





**At Columbia Economic Team,**  
with your support, opportunities  
and challenges are equally  
embraced on behalf of the  
community.

**Thank you for your engagement,  
partnership and support!**

