

Gorge Commission Appointment July 19, 2023

I appreciate the attention that the community has given to this matter and the patience which my fellow commissioners, the staff and the candidates have shown. Major appointments are the decisions wherein we are exercising our power to the greatest extent to influence the policy and culture of another entity, in this case, the Gorge Commission. So this is a moment when the public should be watching carefully what we do and we should be explaining clearly the reasons for our actions.

I also appreciate the exercise done by my fellow commissioners to identify our criteria prior to selection. It is important to decide what one is looking for before starting to look. Otherwise, attractive candidates have the same fixating effect as bright shiny objects.

A third appreciation I have is for the extra time that tabling this decision gave the applicants to better express themselves via the more thorough application and for me to talk with the personal references offered by the candidates. I will return to this issue because the perception of Elaine Albrich that the public would reasonably have taken away from the last meeting was incorrect and misleading.

One of the criteria that we commissioners agree on is representing Wasco County citizens through the County Commissioners. And under this criteria, I want to address the contentious issue of residency. There are two senses of representation at work here. One sense is to carry out the policies espoused by the Board of County Commissioners. All the applicants agree that they will keep in close consultation with us.

Another sense is the democratic principle that the authority of government comes from the consent of the governed. So residency does matter because the residents of Wasco County will not trust the authority of the Gorge Commission unless they know and trust the person who is representing them. '

Rather than delve into a technical analysis of what constitutes residency, I will weigh this criteria in degrees, from minimal residency to knowing our community well and being well known. Please allow me to justify this by an analogy to baptism.

According to the catechism that I was taught as a boy, there was a long time when Catholics believed that a person had to be baptized in order to get into heaven. Now any institution as old and large as the Catholic Church would have to allow some exceptions sometimes. So I was taught there are three types of baptism. Baptism by water is the usual way. Baptism by blood happens in situations such as a soldier dying on a battlefield and making peace with God before it is too late. And then there is baptism by desire which applied to lots of people who really wanted to be baptized but died while waiting for a priest to make his yearly trek through their community.

Returning to the matter at hand, I say that Elaine Albrich should not be excluded on the basis of residency because she has shown a desire to reside in Dufur but at the same time, this constitutes a low degree of residency. The other candidates, Mike Ballinger and Dave Peters have high degrees of residency. It's not just amount of time in the community, but insertion in

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the basic elements of business, church, cultural events and if you want to quantify it, how many local people are in one's contacts file.

All three applicants are qualified in regard to being able to deal with complex and often conflicting issues. Yet, the background of the candidates gives us a diversity of talents and trainings to select from. Mike brings a small business perspective. Dave has experience in planning and fire response. Elaine has technical knowledge of land use law and environmental science. Her expertise is so deep that she could be better placed as a staff member doing the precision work of writing policy than a Board Member navigating the political ramifications of decisions.

The criteria of communication skills also has two aspects. Two the applicants display the difference clearly. Ms. Albrich has technical communication skills as shown in her legal work. Mike Ballinger has plain language communication skills as shown in his weekly column in our local paper.

Another criteria we identified is negotiation and at the heart of negotiation is compromise. And in this vein, I also want to call out another criteria of holding "middle ground" environmental values relative to the citizens of Wasco County. I mentioned at the outset that our appointment affects the culture of the Gorge Commission. So in the abstract, it is important to avoid appointing people to the Gorge Commission that will stymie the ability of the commission negotiate and compromise due to polarization caused by overly strident members.

I admit it is very difficult to define what a middle ground is, but I offer that our prior Gorge Commissioners, Jim Foster and Rodger Nichols were examples. With great confidence, I know that I am not an example of middle ground. And just to be clear, I wouldn't disqualify myself, but I would rate myself low in terms of being middle ground. I consider Dave Peters to be an example of middle ground and Mike Ballinger as well. From my own personal experience and that of others, Mike is not so much an environmentalist as a naturalist; meaning that he encourages people to engage with nature and appreciate nature so deeply and personally that we are willing to defend it.

At this point, I ask my fellow commissioners and the public to listen with an open mind because the description of Elaine Albrich's environmental values made our meeting a month ago did not cohere to my personal impression gained from interviewing her. Thanks to our decision to table this matter, the applicants were given a more thorough application in which to describe themselves, and I took advantage of the time to interview references for each.

The testimony we heard last week was based on facts that portrayed Ms. Albrich as overly zealous in challenging the integrity of the Scenic Area with regard to issues such as Urban Growth Boundaries and the siting of renewable energy installations. In total contrast, I heard from half a dozen people that she holds strong environmentalist values having studied environmental science and served on several committees related to climate and ESG. Jim Foster, an attorney whom I mentioned earlier, helped me resolve this disparity by telling me that is a very common mistake for people to judge the values and character of lawyers based on the arguments and positions that they have taken for their clients. I ask us to make this

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distinction as well. Last month we heard about her legal work. Her personal values are something else.

While it is natural to imagine that Ms. Albrich will carry baggage due to her legal work, my assessment of her personal activity is more of an environmentalist than myself. She is active in policy writing related to agrivoltaics, Renewable Forests, and wind energy siting. These are all efforts I personally support. You can criticize me at this moment for being overly rigid, but while I admire her environmental stances, for the same reason, it causes me to rate her lower on the criteria of “middle ground.”

It takes some effort to weigh multiple criteria and come to a single conclusion. As I weigh all the above, my first choice is Mike Ballinger based on representation, residency, communication, middle ground, and his inspirational naturalism. Elaine Aldrich is my second choice due to lower degrees of residency and middle ground. Dave Peters has served our community with compassion and competence in the areas of housing and fire and rescue but has not had as much experience in Gorge related issues.