

Save Helvetia is a farmland preservation organization that works to protect farm and forestland in Washington County. While we have been formally organized for 10 years, all of our members have experience with land use issues that span 25 to 30 years. We have come to champion citizen participation in land use and have personal experience with our inputs having improved the local decision making processes. The legislature usually conducts hearings in the Spring and this is a very active time for farmers. Farmers often cannot turn on a dime to travel to provide testimony in Salem. The remote access to public hearings and meetings that have arisen because of the pandemic has provided us an opportunity to see how its current use and its continuation can facilitate the inclusion of more farmers into the legislative process while providing the legislature with "boots on the ground" perspectives. We have been fortunate in Washington County in that hearings typically only take us 1/2 day whereas in other areas of Oregon, this can involve several days travel and over-nite lodging. Our advocacy focuses on agricultural land use, while a multitude of matters come before you that impact many across the State of Oregon. Continuing remote access opens the door to improved citizen involvement in everyday democracy and provides the legislature an evolved base of information from which to make decisions.