



Board of Commissioners, Columbia County
230 Strand Street
St. Helens, OR 97051

Re: NEXT Renewable Fuels Local Land Use Permits

Dear Columbia County Commissioners:

I am writing on behalf of the Clatskanie Chamber of Commerce and its 45 members to comment on the proposed NEXT Renewable Fuels permits. We would like to voice our full support that the project be permitted. NEXT meets the requirements for the Columbia County land use permits and we urge you to approve these permits without any delay.

The Clatskanie Chamber focuses on our region's economic success, be it a small family-owned business or a \$2 billion renewable fuels project. Luckily for our region, the \$2 billion NEXT project is the kind of infrastructure development that will provide ripple benefits throughout our community. We frequently hear the statistic that more than 70 percent of our county population leaves town for work every day. While it is a necessity so workers can support their lives and the lives of their families, it's a tragedy that more opportunity isn't available here in wonderful Columbia County.

Construction of this facility will hire more than 3,000 highly skilled workers, the majority of whom already live in our area and other nearby parts of Oregon and southern Washington. The average salary during construction is upwards of \$75,000/year or more, which is definitely above our county average. Further, the NEXT facility will create more than 240 permanent direct jobs and hundreds of ripple benefit jobs in our county. These new jobs will inevitably lead to more money spent in our retail and grocery stores, on tourism and local recreation, and with local non-profits and organizations. It means more grand openings and fewer "out of business" signs. It means success for our residents and stability for the workforce. A workforce, by the way, that will be centered around the green economy and 21st-century technology.

Beyond jobs, the \$2 billion NEXT project will generate \$16 million annually in tax revenue annually for vital county services. Again, this single project will benefit all residents of Columbia County by paying taxes that support local education, libraries, public safety, county health services, job training, road improvements, small business assistance, building repair and so much more. Additionally, NEXT will pay more than \$5 million in annual Port fees that will help modernize our port to make it safer and more marketable for economic activity, which will in turn lead to more job creation and an expansion of our core economic engines that underpin our local tax base.

The Chamber and its members have been active participants in the public review process. We have participated in open houses, held our own information sessions and provided public comments into the record. We appreciate that NEXT is engaging stakeholder of all opinions – supporters, opponents, and those who just want to know more.

The NEXT Renewable Fuels maximizes its use of industrial land, minimizes its environmental footprint, protects our local water resources, restores wetlands, creates jobs, generates tax revenue and adheres to local, state and federal regulations. NEXT is the kind of company we want operating in Columbia County and we want the ribbon cutting ceremony to happen sooner rather than later.

The Clatskanie Chamber of Commerce thanks you and the Planning Department for your diligent work evaluating this project. Please approve the NEXT permits without delay and without a continuation of the comment period.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sarah Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sarah Johnson, President
Clatskanie Chamber of Commerce