

Jan. 15, 2024

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

RE: NXT Renewables Hearing

Dear Columbia County Board of Commissioners:

Please include this letter in the written record regarding the NXT Renewables permits.

In a “guest commentary” in the Jan. 2, 2024 edition of the Chronicle & Chief, Scappoose area resident Greg Pettit presented inaccurate information, false speculations, and outright lies which opponents of the NXT project are using in their arguments.

Pettit’s arguments against NXT Renewables’ permit for a rail branch line - not a “rail yard” as defined by the Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA) - at the Port Westward (PW) industrial site near Clatskanie are based on his totally erroneous assumption that NXT has changed its operational plans in a “bait and switch” move from transporting nearly all feedstock and product by water, to using “mile-long jumbo manifest trains.”

That’s a lie.

The whole reason for NXT choosing PW is because the site is the best developable deep-water port on the Lower Columbia. If NXT was going to use trains primarily, it would have located somewhere else. Somewhere that anti-job-creation activists haven’t targeted for non-development.

NXT always has been forthcoming that it needs a backup plan in the very rare cases when the Columbia River is closed to commercial maritime traffic, as occurred during the 2015 wildfires, or when the dock is damaged and temporarily shutdown such as on Nov. 12, 2023 when a tugboat freakishly hauled a gravel barge between the Port Westward dock and the land.

NXT has said some materials needed for the distillation of renewable diesel, including some considered “hazardous,” will be brought in by train on a regular basis. That will amount to about **30 additional rail cars per month** added to the trains already coming to PW - not the new “mile-long jumbo manifest trains,” Pettit has fabricated. Additional unit trains would be used only **temporarily** in the **WORST CASE** scenarios of a river and/or dock shutdown in order to keep the plant operating, fill orders, and avoid layoffs.

Regular use of the rail at the 30-car level has always been a part of the plan. Local farmers, including Mike Seely, Jasmine Lillich and Brandon Schilling, expressed concern that rail cars could block a nearby roadway intersection and requested that NXT figure out a way to avoid that potential impact. The rail operator, Portland & Western, also requested that NXT design its branch line to avoid any potential impacts to the rail cars that need to reach Global Partners PW operation. NXT listened to those concerns and redesigned its plan to accommodate them. Then Seely, Columbia Riverkeeper and 1000 Friends of Oregon, appealed it to LUBA which overturned the permit on Oct. 21, 2022.

So now, NXT has redesigned the planned track again to comply with LUBA’s demands. Roughly a quarter mile of the branch line crosses land that is zoned agricultural, which is allowed under county zoning codes. The rest of the line is on industrially-zoned property.

That is the truth about the rail saga. Pettit and other opponents have dreamed up these ideas of NXT’s “ever-changing plans,” eroding promises, and jumbo trains. They are serving up baloney, hysteria and paranoia.

Apparently, Pettit also considers himself an expert on renewable diesel market conditions, declaring “it is highly unlikely they’ll acquire their touted feedstocks to be brought in by ship.” In fact, NXT has memoranda of understanding in place for feedstock sources. Even if NXT were to rely on “virgin seed oil crops,” the renewable diesel made from it is still “greener”

than fossil fuel. In opposing NXT, are the self-proclaimed environmentalists advocating for the status quo of fossil fuels?

Using his erroneous information and assumptions, Pettit hurls mud at the hearing process, and insinuates that someone is being paid off. That's libel. If you believe his insinuations, consider this: the federal, state, and county permits specifically dictate what can happen. It is the law that if the permits aren't followed, steps will be taken to ensure they are. Since Pettit is a retired, long-time employee of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), he knows this.

Pettit also takes aim at the location of the proposed plant behind levees on the Columbia River flood plain. The Department of State Lands (DSL) have in-depth studies of the levees of the Beaver Drainage Improvement Company (BDIC) and have determined they are adequate for additional industrial development. That is why the environmentally-conscious DSL issued NXT permits.

The maintenance of the levees, by the way, is the responsibility of the BDIC, which turned down an agreement not to oppose the NXT project. That agreement would have led to millions of dollars in additional funding for the BDIC.

Speaking of permits, one current claim by opponents is that the DEQ issued NXT's air permit without sufficient study. In fact, the DEQ, with the reputation of being one of the toughest regulating agencies in the world, issued the permit after an 18-month-long exhaustive process which included a host of new requirements. After NXT worked to meet and exceed those requirements, the DEQ acknowledged that the facility does not have an appreciable impact on local air resources. NXT, according to the DEQ, "is not a major source of EPA-listed hazardous air pollutants," and "the potential emissions meet health risk standards for the community and do not require additional controls to be protective of public health."

Pettit claims that NXT couldn't get insurance. More baloney! The Portland General Electric (PGE) and Global Partners facilities at PW are insured. Does he honestly believe that investors would put up \$2 billion for an uninsurable facility?

Outrageously inaccurate statements about money spent by the county and the port district for improvements to PW and the roads leading to it, are also made by Pettit. The fact is that PGE and Global Partners paid the vast majority of the cost of those improvements through their huge tax valuations and fees. At present, the two existing PW industries pay over 20 percent of all Columbia County's property taxes - industrial, commercial, farm, forest, and residential combined.

Currently, the tax valuation within the Clatskanie School District boundaries is roughly \$1 billion. NXT's \$2 billion-plus valuation will triple that. We won't know the exact figures until NXT goes on line, now estimated at 2027, but with the two PW industries now paying over 20 percent of all property taxes in the county, the tripling of the tax valuation will bring huge benefits to all of the county-wide tax supported districts, as well as the Clatskanie School District, Clatskanie Rural Fire Protection District, Clatskanie Park and Recreation District, Clatskanie Library District, Rainier Cemetery District, etc. In a partial breakdown provided by NXT, which has declined any tax exemptions, it will be paying Columbia County **\$16 million PER YEAR**, and the Port (in fees and taxes) \$5.5 million.

Pettit talks about Columbia County's low unemployment rate and relatively high income average. Yes, but 70 percent of employed persons who live in Columbia County have to travel outside of the county to their jobs. The Clatskanie area has fewer jobs than it had a half century ago, and approximately 50 percent of its residents have low to moderate income levels. A large majority of NXT's 240 permanent family-wage jobs can be filled by people who already live in the area. Instead of commuting to Portland, Longview or elsewhere, and adding to the carbon-emitting problem, they will be working close to home and will have time to serve on local boards and councils, coach youth sports, volunteer for community service projects, and grow gardens. The construction period will bring a good deal more traffic to the area, but as a resident along the PW route, I am willing to make that sacrifice for the well-being of the community I love.

Pettit suggests that the county and port should be concentrating their efforts for more local jobs on agriculture and other natural resources.

Over-regulated forest-based jobs are struggling to survive. Commercial fishing on the Columbia, once an important industry, is virtually gone. The Wauna paper mill has about 300 fewer employees now than it had 50 years ago.

Beginning in 1907, about 12,000 acres of farmland were created by building levees in the Clatskanie area. Prior to that it, today's dikelands were considered to be swamps. Now, they would be valuable wetlands, and would never be allowed to be drained. Ironically, some of those opposing NXT, also oppose the restoration of 450 acres of wetlands that the DSL is demanding NXT create in order to fill a few puddles on the industrial site. What is now PW was farmland for only about 30 years, between the diking and the U.S. Army acquiring it as an ammunition shipping and storage point in 1942. It has been a military/industrial site for over 80 years.

Despite all this agriculturally-zoned dikeland acreage, only a handful of full-time, commercially-viable farms exist in our area. Agricultural is great - some of my fondest childhood memories were spent on my Uncle George's farm on the BDIC. The Saturday Farmers Market and the Food Hub are fine additions to our community, and provide a market for local small farmers and gardeners, and a draw for tourists. However the number of jobs they create, the impact they have on the economy and the tax base which funds the services we need, are minuscule compared to what NXT will bring.

Pettit's commentary opened with a statement that NXT developers had promised "a renewable diesel and aviation fuel refinery" which "would bring high-paying jobs, a green economy, and a huge tax base for the county. Who wouldn't support that?"

Right - who wouldn't support it? People who believe the lies and fears spread by Columbia Riverkeepers, Pettit, and the relatively small group of locals and "Not In My Backyard" activists who share his beliefs - that's who.

I stand with the former and current elected state officials, the mayors, council members, port and county commissioners, education leaders, business owners, labor leaders, non-profit organizations, environmental groups which appreciate the very green nature of this project, and the hundreds of other local residents who support NXT and all the benefits it will bring to our community and county.

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