

January 2, 2024

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



Re: NEXT Renewable Fuels Local Land Use Permits

Dear Columbia County Commissioners:

As the owner and operator of the Port Westward Industrial Park, the Port of Columbia County expresses our support for the proposed NEXT Renewable Fuels permits being considered by the Columbia County Commission. The NEXT project and proposed rail improvement are appropriate for Port Westward because they will be located on vacant land already zoned for Rural Industrial Planned Development (RIPD) and intended for industrial activity. The requested modification to the application would simply shift a portion of the rail branch line into the RIPD zone, within an area that the County Commission has previously approved for development. In our view, this is an improvement on the earlier proposal as it focuses development within the existing RIPD zone.

Only approximately one quarter of a mile of the rail improvement will be on agricultural land in the modified permit, meaning little-to-no impact on PA-80 zoned land. The applications also conform to the Land Use Board of Appeals decision by removing entirely any siding tracks from the agricultural zone. The small corridor of land necessary to extend rail service to the project will have minimal impact on agricultural land, the vast majority of which is owned by the Port of Columbia County and intended for industrial development to take advantage of the Port's unique deepwater marine terminal.

The NEXT project design depends on direct river access for the bulk of import and export movements. However, a rail connection to this facility has been part of the original design since it was first discussed with the County in 2020 as certain operational materials must be moved by rail.

The benefits the NEXT project will have on Columbia County's economy cannot be understated. The project will create more than 3,500 construction jobs and more than 240 permanent, family-wage jobs in an industry anticipated to operate in Columbia County for the next 80 years or more. With an over \$2 billion investment, NEXT will be one of the highest taxpayers in the County, increasing much-needed funding to our local schools, roads, and public services. In addition, by bringing this new, green energy to our region, Columbia County will be a leader in the clean fuels industry, and this new industry will lead to job training in clean fuels to attract related industries to our region.

We urge the County Commission to approve NEXT's permits so this project can come one step closer to being a reality. NEXT is a win-win for both our local economy and the environment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean P. Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Sean P. Clark
Executive Director