

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 to comment on the proposed NEXT Renewable Fuels permits being considered by the Columbia County Board of Commissioners. NEXT Renewable Fuels meets the standard of the permits and should be granted approval. I am in support of the project and believe it balances economic development and environmental responsibility.

Large and small agricultural operations, family farms and homes have existed compatibly alongside military and industrial usage at Port Westward for over 80 years. North Columbia County has thousands of acres of under-utilized land, and yet, too many of our residents cannot find jobs near their homes. Too many of our young people cannot stay in their hometowns because of the lack of quality jobs.

I support the immediate approval of NEXT's local land use permits because of the following:

- Port Westward is one of only five deep water ports in Oregon and has been zoned for industrial uses (RIPD zone) since the County adopted its current comprehensive plan in 1984. This application would facilitate industrial uses on land that has been planned for industrial use, and takes advantage of the deep water port;
- The NEXT Renewable Diesel project design depends on direct river access for the bulk of import and export movements. However, there are certain operational materials that must be moved by rail cars and rail provides an essential backup option if the dock becomes unavailable for any reason;
- The County has already decided that the NEXT Renewable Diesel facility can and should be constructed. These permits are the next steps because they ensure adequate multimodal transportation availability for the facility.
- A rail connection to this facility has been part of the design since it was first discussed with the County in 2020, and NEXT has been open about its intended use.
- The only rail improvement on agricultural land is an approximately one-quarter mile strip, meaning that there will be little-to-no impact on PA-80 zoned land;
- These applications conform to the Land Use Board of Appeals decision by removing entirely any siding tracks from the agricultural zone;
- These applications will provide for a major improvement of Hermo Road, which will enhance the overall transportation system for nearby residents and farm activities in the area.

- NEXT will hire skilled union trades people to build their \$2 billion renewable fuels facility, creating more than 3,500 jobs during construction and prioritizing local hiring. This project supports hard-working union families and ensures highly-skilled labor will build a safe and reliable facility;
- NEXT will employ more than 240 full-time positions during operations, bringing more prosperity to our region. Most of these jobs can be filled by our local talent pool and NEXT has agreed to remain neutral in any future union organizing efforts for operating staff. Further, NEXT is working with the various trade councils to establish job training programs so Columbia County can become a green jobs hub in the transportation sector;
- NEXT will contribute more than \$16 million annually in local tax revenue and \$5.5 million in port fees, which can support vital county services, taxing district projects, and port modernization. This could lead to additional work in the region;
- NEXT will restore more than 450 acres of defunct hybrid poplar property back into a thriving wetland habitat, which is a boost to the ecosystem and neighboring properties.

I believe that the preservation and improvement of our environment can be compatible with economic development. The NEXT project is an excellent example of that. Expert research on the subject concludes that renewable diesel:

- Is up to 80 percent cleaner than fossil diesel and doesn't require engine retrofitting;
- Could eliminate more than 5 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, making the project a significant net benefit to cleaning our air;
- Will drastically reduce NOx, CO and particulate matter in the transportation industry.


The project's impact on farm-zoned land is very minimal and amounts to a small corridor of land necessary to extend rail service to the project. The vast majority of this land is owned by the Port of Columbia County and has been intended for industrial development and operation since the Port acquired it from the federal government 57 years ago.

I am a clear supporter of the project, but I'm also a 5<sup>th</sup> generation Columbia County resident who wants to ensure that this project is beneficial to my community. I want to emphasize the benefit this \$2 billion clean transportation project brings to the Port of Columbia County. The State of Oregon has a critical shortage of large marine industrial sites and deepwater ports. Port Westward meets both of those definitions, and NEXT Renewable Fuels chose it for these reasons. I'm happy they did. NEXT's investment will bring significant benefits which will enhance safety, protect the environment, monitor water quality, and modernize the Port of Columbia County (through \$5.5 million paid annually in port fees). The property taxes NEXT will pay will have huge benefits for county-wide and Clatskanie area tax districts.

NEXT is supported by federal, state, and local elected officials. It has earned the trust and support of thousands of local residents, and continues to engage community

members like me to ensure our questions are answered and our concerns are heard. The Board of Commissioners must approve these permits so we can welcome NEXT as a long-term partner in our region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored rectangular background. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Deborah Hazen".

Deborah Hazen