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From: Theodora Tsongas <ttsongas@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 9, 2024 3:47 PM
To: Planning Department.UserGroup
Subject: NXT applications for a railyard and refinery

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To: Columbia County Board of Commissioners
via: Planning@ColumbiaCountyOR.gov
January 9, 2024
re: NXT Applications for a Rail Yard and Refinery

Greetings Commissioners,

I am Dr. Theodora Tsongas, an environmental health scientist with a career in public health. I am a member of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility and I am testifying today to urge you to deny NXT's (formerly NEXE) applications for a rail yard and refinery due to its adverse effects on the health and well-being of the Columbia County community. Specifically, the impacts of this planned development to farmland, and air and water resources are significant and negative and will be costly into the future.

The NXT proposal for a rail yard does not address the potential adverse health impacts on the local and regional community. For example, diesel emissions from train engines are a significant health hazard and would adversely impact the air quality in the county and region. Diesel emissions, which include fine particulate matter, black carbon, and volatile organic compounds are associated with increased illness and death from lung, heart, and vascular disease as well as developmental and cognitive disturbances. Increased light and noise will also have an adverse effect on the health of both people and wildlife.

The proposed rail yard with increased rail traffic and mile long unit trains will significantly increase air pollution, noise, and interference with road access and traffic in the area. Furthermore, delays at railroad crossings can significantly and adversely impact emergency vehicle response times, with the real potential for worsening outcomes including death rather than survival. The optimistically estimated 7.5 minutes is too long for a stroke victim or fire response. These things need to be taken into account by the County Board when evaluating proposals, as they affect the health and quality of life of the whole community as well as its neighbors.

Finally, NXT's proposal does not adequately address any of these and other community concerns and NXT's reliability is in question as to its ability to respond in good faith as promised. The County Board must consider the history and reputation of this company when the Board makes decisions about turning over a large swath of land, disrupting local and regional agricultural and social economies and ecosystems, and community assets such as pristine and beautiful landscapes, clean air and water, and real natural resources, in exchange for a questionable project that could result in a stranded asset that has only succeeded in disrupting local ecosystems and leaving the County holding the bag.

I respectfully urge you to deny NXT's application for a rail yard and refinery because of the adverse effects it will have on the health of the community.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments and for your time and attention to these concerns.