November 6, 2026
Columbia County Board of Commissioners
230 Strand Street
St. Helens, OR 97051

Re: Public Comment Opposing the Proposed 837-Acre Agricultural Rezone at Port Westward

Dear Commissioners,
My name is Wendy Schmidt and my husband and I live within The Beaver Drainage District and less than 1 mile from the proposed 837-acre rezone. I have many concerns for the future of my farm. We have a family farm, raising poultry and livestock for eggs and meat. We also have numerous fruit trees and berry bushes, that supply blueberries, cherries, and apples to our local community.

The Beaver Drainage District (BDIC) is composed of mineral-based & alluvial soils, peat mosses and liquefaction within a floodplain. Anything built on these soils does not have stability. In the wet season, the dirt is quicksand. The roads can't handle the current traffic. The levee, containing Port Westward, is below FEMA standards. These mineral-based soils are conductive. There is a serious problem with stray current, overcurrent, and voltage seepage. Port Westward already has 2 utility companies: PGE, a natural gas turbine driven facility, and PUD, our local Hub. The 2 electrical facilities cause power surges, audible resonance, and earth vibrations. Recently, there have been 2 major house fires due to electrical failure.

Water is everywhere, and we are all connected. If there is a serious spill within the canals, sloughs, and/or ditches, the contamination will quickly spread. It is about 3.5 miles across the Beaver Drainage District and. In comparison, the Longview Nippon Dynawave (Dept of Ecology-State of Washington- Nippon Dynawave Industrial Incident (ecology.wa.gov/spill-cleanup)) disaster caused a toxic chemical spill, drastically changing the pH of the connecting waterways and traveling 11 miles to the Columbia River, killing close to 3,000 fish in a matter of hours. If a toxic spill of this magnitude ever occurred at Port Westward, with the volume of waterways and the limited access, there is good chance that help would not arrive fast enough to stop the spill from contaminating the entire drainage district.

The Port of Columbia County may have a vision of the types of clients they would like to see build a facility on these lands, but there is no defined immediate plan, and it is hard to determine if the language of this rezone for a "wood products and processing facility" is too narrow. RIPD is industrial zoning and does not limit future possible uses of the land to only one type of facility. In viewing this request to rezone, one must look at all the possibilities. For the past 60+ years, since the release of the land from the Army Corps to the Port of Columbia County, The Port has been trying to entice clients to build on this land without understanding what the land itself is capable of. Years and millions of tax payer dollars have been wasted on possible permits and lawsuits with the end result always the same; the levee can't handle the impact of a large-scale industrial facility.

Another concern is the mitigation requirement with the State of Oregon. When a possible client company comes in, they want to alter the waterways to their needs, and changing the waterways requires, in some cases, a reevaluation of the entire district by The Army Corps of Engineers. The Beaver Drainage District is not that big. A rezone of 837-acres to RIPD would offset the agricultural balance of the District, tipping the scale to favor industry. This is not what this land was designed for. Prime 80 Agricultural land is rare. The soils that make up the land of Port Westward and The District are rich in minerals, mosses and water, all within the Great Flood Basin of The Columbia River. It is the most favorable climate for organic farming and livestock operations. A rezone of this magnitude would threaten the agricultural future of the BDIC. We rely on healthy fertile soils and clean water to make a living, feed our families and provide for our local communities.

For the health and safety of my family, neighbors and community, I strongly urge the Columbia County Board of Commissioners to protect its valuable resources and **Deny** the rezone of 837-acres at Port Westward of Prime-80 farmland to RIPD industrial.
If this land is rezoned, it will be forever lost.

Thank you for your consideration.
Sincerely,

Wendy Schmidt
Beaver Drainage District
Clatskanie, Oregon