

COLUMBIA COUNTY

Board of Commissioners Office

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9/26/25

Columbia Pacific Economic Development District
PO Box 1535
St Helens, Oregon 97051

RE: Business Oregon Housing Infrastructure Support Fund Application – Letter of Support

Dear Ms. Heath,

Columbia County has partnered with the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District (ColPac) for several years to advance housing initiatives, buildable land studies, and infrastructure analysis. As a large rural county with limited resources, we face significant barriers in addressing the growing demand for housing and the infrastructure required to support it.

Through recent grant funding from DLCD, we have identified critical infrastructure needs tied to buildable lands across our rural county and cities. However, a major barrier remains: our planning, building, and septic records exist only in paper form—stored in 313 file drawers, the equivalent of 628 banker's boxes.

This outdated system directly impacts housing and infrastructure progress. Retrieving, cross-referencing, and reproducing records for each project typically consumes 1–4 staff hours before review can even begin. Across dozens of projects countywide, this translates to hundreds of staff hours lost every month—time that could otherwise be devoted to advancing development and infrastructure solutions. These delays ripple outward, slowing down housing approvals, infrastructure investment decisions, and ultimately the pace of community growth.

Digitizing our records would eliminate these bottlenecks. With digital access, staff could reduce document retrieval from hours to minutes, saving an estimated 2,000+ staff hours annually – an estimated cost of \$110,000.00 annually. Importantly, digitized permits could be directly integrated with our GIS mapping tool, creating a powerful resource that improves efficiency for homeowners, developers, and staff alike. This integration would allow faster site analysis, better-informed infrastructure planning, and more transparent decision-making.

In addition to labor savings, digitization would also eliminate the recurring cost of storing thousands of paper records. Columbia County currently spends approximately \$11,760.00 annually on rented office space. By transitioning to digital records, these funds could be redirected toward infrastructure improvements and housing-related priorities, further multiplying the benefits of this investment.

For these reasons, Columbia County strongly supports ColPac's application to Business Oregon Housing Infrastructure funding. This investment will modernize our systems, expand staff capacity, and directly support infrastructure projects that are essential to meeting urgent housing needs in our rural communities. With this funding, we can move from identifying infrastructure barriers to removing them—unlocking opportunities for housing development and long-term economic vitality.

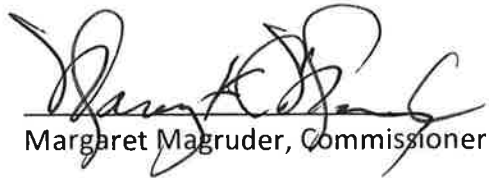
Sincerely,



Kellie Jo Smith, Chair



Casey Garrett, Commissioner



Margaret Magruder, Commissioner