

COLUMBIA COUNTY

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Commissioners

Margaret Magruder
Kellie Jo Smith
Casey Garrett

Administration

Jacyn Normine
Kathy Coddington

Communications

Mark Pacheco



ST. HELENS, OR 97051

230 Strand St., Room 338

Direct (503) 397-4322

Fax (503) 366-7243

columbiacountyor.gov

February 11, 2026

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
United States Senate
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Letter of Support for City of St. Helens – Community Initiated Project Request - St. Helens Reservoir Project

Dear Senator Merkley,

On behalf of Columbia County, we are writing to express strong support for the City of St. Helens' Fiscal Year 2027 Community Initiated Project (CIP) appropriations request for the construction of a new 5.0-million-gallon finished water storage reservoir. This project will replace failed water storage infrastructure, strengthen the resilience of the City's drinking water system, and remove a critical infrastructure barrier to housing production and sustainable community growth.

St. Helens continues to experience steady population growth and increasing demand for new housing and mixed-use development. Adequate and reliable water storage is foundational to meeting these needs while protecting public health and safety. The loss of the City's oldest and second-largest reservoir has created a significant operational storage deficit, limiting system redundancy and reducing the City's ability to maintain adequate pressure, fire flow, and emergency response capacity. Construction of a new reservoir will restore lost capacity, improve operational reliability, and ensure the water system can safely support future growth.

The project demonstrates a high level of readiness. The City has completed and adopted a Reservoir Siting Study, selected a preferred site based on technical, environmental, and cost considerations, and is currently completing a land appraisal in preparation for acquisition. With funding in place, the City is positioned to advance final design and construction. The project has also received broad support at the local, state, and federal levels, including recent federal investment through the Omnibus Appropriations Act, reflecting its importance to regional infrastructure resilience and housing capacity.

In addition to improving drinking water reliability and public safety, this investment will support local economic activity by creating construction-related jobs and leveraging local labor and materials where feasible. The project's design will incorporate modern seismic standards, efficient operations, and stormwater management practices that strengthen climate resilience and protect long-term water quality.

For these reasons, Columbia County strongly supports the City of St. Helens' Community-Initiated Project request and respectfully urges your consideration of this critical infrastructure investment. Thank you for your continued leadership on infrastructure, housing, and community resilience issues that are vital to Oregon's future.

Sincerely,

Kellie Jo Smith, Chair

Casey Garrett, Commissioner

Margaret Magruder, Commissioner