



January 17, 2022

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

Re: NEXT Renewable Fuels; Application DR 21-03 and V 21-05; Application CU 21-04

Dear Columbia County Commissioners:

I am writing to comment on the proposed NEXT Renewable Fuels permit 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 nearly 80 years. North Columbia County has thousands of acres of under-utilized land, but too many of our residents cannot find jobs near their homes. Our young people cannot stay in their hometowns because of lack of quality jobs. Wage-earners who must commute to their jobs, are far less likely to volunteer in their communities, and Clatskanie is a community which depends on volunteers to provide so many programs and projects that enhance the life of our community. The NEXT renewable diesel project will:

- Create more than 250 family-wage jobs that our local workers can fill;
- Generate more than \$16 million annually in county tax revenue;
- Bring a new, clean, long-term industry to our county that directly contributes to a cleaner transportation sector on the west coast.

The Board of Commissioners should consider the facts that not only does NEXT Renewable Fuels meet the stringent regulations set forth at the local, state and federal levels, but it goes above and beyond to protect and preserve our local environment. NEXT is building on land that hasn't been used for more than grazing for nearly 60 years. I support NEXT's mitigation program because it:

- Is designed to the above-and-beyond "enhancement" level of mitigation, which restores four times as much wetlands as it disturbs and creates pristine habitat for local species (it is a multiplier of current habitat, not a loss!);
- Creates crucial pollinator habitat that will benefit the local agricultural businesses as well as the entire regional ecosystem;
- Serves as a natural flood basin for the Beaver Drainage District during storm events;
- Incorporates feedback from adjacent impacted landowners into the design to accommodate special needs or conditions of neighboring operations.

The NEXT project relies on the river and rail transportation available at Port Westward, and is consistent with heavy industrial and energy uses already established there. The RIPD zone specifically allows “production, processing, assembling, packaging, or treatment of materials; research and development laboratories, and storage and distribution of services and facilities” if certain conditions are met. According to the County’s own Comprehensive Plan and Zone Code, this zone is appropriate for uses that take advantage of river and rail access, and which may “require a rural location in order to take advantage of adequate rail and/or vehicle and/or deepwater port and/or airstrip access.”

NEXT’s investment will bring significant benefits that 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 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 which is owned by the Port of Columbia County and is intended for industrial development and operation.

I am a clear supporter of the project, but I’m also a 5th generation Columbia County resident who wants to ensure this project is beneficial to my community. NEXT has voluntarily pledged not to apply for tax exemptions. The benefits that its high tax valuation will bring to Columbia County, the Sheriff’s Office, the 9-1-1 district, and the cash-strapped Clatskanie School District, fire, park and recreation, library districts, etc. are tremendous.

NEXT is supported by our federal, state and local elected officials. They have earned the trust and support of thousands of local residents. They continue to engage community members like me to ensure our questions are answered and our concerns are heard. My family and I urge the Board of Commissioners to approve these permits so we can welcome NEXT as a long-term partner in our region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah Hazen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deborah Hazen
346 NE 5th Street
Clatskanie, OR 97016