

January 14, 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 a third-generation resident of Columbia County and have served our community in many ways, including as a Clatskanie City Councilor (2000-2016) and currently as a School Board Member (2018-present). This letter has been unanimously supported by the Clatskanie School Board. As a Board, we are strong supporters of the NEXT Renewable Fuels project and request the Board of Commissioners approve the siting of the NEXT plant at Port Westward. NEXT has designed a world-class clean fuels facility that protects our local water resources and creates a wetland mitigation site that is beneficial to the local environment, as well as to our school district through funding and partnerships for new educational curriculums.

I have attended, along with fellow board members, numerous public hearings, open houses, one-on-one briefings, and other information sessions to learn about the NEXT renewable diesel project. We find the NEXT proposal in line with County Commission requirements. The facility will use, store, treat and discharge water in an acceptable way and not impact local treatment systems. Nor will it impact the Columbia River maritime system to move supply and products in and out of the facility. This facility will be built in an industrial-zoned area and built upon barren, low-grade wetlands (confirmed in a letter written by the Oregon Department of State Lands), even though there are those that incorrectly claim it is high-quality agricultural land. NEXT has committed to restoring nearly four times the wetland acreage (more than 450 acres) that will meet high restoration standards. Not only will Columbia County get a clean fuels processing facility and the benefits derived from that, but we will also get a thriving wetland that enhances our local ecosystem.

We are aware that our school superintendent, Cathy Hurowitz, is also sharing with you the potential of creating an environmental science curriculum around the wetland mitigation development in partnership with NEXT Renewable Fuels so I will not go into detail about that here. But what we would like to underscore is the financial game-changer the siting of NEXT Renewable Fuels at Port Westward would be for our local school district. We are a small, rural district (700 students) that has been forced to reduce what we can offer our students with regard to electives as well as STEM based classes. Ever since the passage of Measure 5, the Oregon formula for funding school districts benefits the higher populated urban schools over the rural. A \$2B investment, such as NEXT Renewable Fuels, in our attendance area will allow our district to be funded solely from local taxes and no longer be dependent on the state. Luckily our local taxpayers passed a \$10M bond this last May which will allow us to replace and/or repair the roofs on our two buildings as well as upgraded HVAC systems and the addition of secure entries in both buildings. Had this

bond not passed, we would have been forced to choose between teachers in the classroom or fixing leaking roofs and band aiding inefficient and archaic HVAC systems.

Bringing NEXT Renewable Fuels to our area will provide our community with 200+ high paying jobs as well as providing sustainable funding to our local taxing districts, and most importantly to us, our school district. We will not have to wait every biennium to see what the Oregon economic forecast is to know what our budget will allow - if teachers can be maintained or laid off, and if exciting new programs can be added or our offerings reduced even further. NEXT has already proven to us their commitment to furthering the quality of education in our area by bringing the potential environmental science curriculum to us and we hope to be able to welcome them as permanent community partners.

NEXT will be among the largest investments made in Columbia County. We want them in our region and look forward to the significant economic benefits that come with it.

This project has been through years of public evaluation. It is time the NEXT project finally moves forward. The Clatskanie School Board urges you to approve the county permits without delay. Thank you for being one of the watchdogs for the future of our beautiful state.

Best regards,

Kathy Engel
Clatskanie School District Board Member

and

Megan Evenson
Clatskanie School District Board Chair

Kara Harris
Clatskanie School District Board Vice-Chair

Ian Wiggins
Clatskanie School District Board Member

Katherine Willis
Clatskanie School District Board Member