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COLUMN: NEXT: Building trust and community

Chris Efird Lou Soumas 23 hrs ago

NEXT Renewable Fuels is building an advanced biofuel facility at Port Westward. Today we are in the planning and permitting stage. Beginning with this op-ed, we intend periodic updates on the project, so that Columbia County residents understand our plans, and know how to reach us to share questions and comments.

As we shape this project, there are several principles that are important to us that we want you to know.

- We're planning a state-of-the-art facility that will allow Oregon to lead in the production of renewable fuels. This facility will only ever produce renewable fuels. Our permits will not allow us to produce anything else and we have neither interest nor intention of doing so.
- The economic benefits will be felt here in Columbia County and in Oregon. That means we will seek to hire locally, and we will not take tax breaks. We have already signed agreements with local unions for construction and potential operation of the facility, and we are exploring local training options for the 200+ operational staff that will be hired. We will be pursuing other local partnerships, such as providing our Advanced Green Diesel fuel for use in county vehicles in Columbia County.
- We want to bring the facility online as soon as possible, so that we can realize the benefits of this project for the community and for our investors. We are sensitive to the community impacts of truck and rail traffic. Our facility will use the Columbia River for movement of our products with minimal use of trucks and railcar to or from the site.

We have already secured 25-acres of land from Teevin Bros., and we have an option for an adjacent parcel. Recently, another piece of land at the Port has become available. The land is ideal for our project, and it would allow us to immediately move forward on permitting.

This new land is within the Columbia County enterprise zone, which gives access to certain benefits, including tax abatements. We want to be clear: if we secure this land, we will not accept any tax breaks; if we are not allowed to decline the tax break, we will make available an equivalent amount

to fund local projects. We have estimated the property tax value to be approximately \$36 million in just the first three years of operations, money that can and should support a range of community services. As with any large project, there are many details to be worked out, including how the funds would be collected and distributed. We are committed to doing that work.

At NEXT, we are interested in growing a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship with the residents of Columbia County. We believe it is our job to earn your trust. To that end, we recently made our first local hire, Natasha Parvey, to lead community outreach. You will see her and us out and about at events this spring and summer. Please don't hesitate to share your comments and questions. In the meantime, you can contact us at info@nextrenewables.com or learn more at www.nextrenewables.com.

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