



CITY OF West Linn

March 7, 2017

Testimony to House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

Chair Evans, Vice-Chairs Boone and Esquivel, and Members of the Committee:

I'm Russ Axelrod, the Mayor of West Linn and I want to thank you for your leadership in addressing safety and other important aspects justifying our collective interests and efforts to repair the Willamette Falls (WF) Locks and reopen our vital Willamette River corridor.

I'm here on behalf of the City of West Linn, and many cities along the Willamette River, to express our strong support for plans to repair and reopen the WF Locks, including our support for SB 256, currently in Ways and Means, that will create a State Commission to facilitate this important transition process to restore the Locks operations and establish their future governance.

As councilor, mayor, and a professional registered geologist in Oregon, I've been assisting heritage issues for the area as member of the WF Locks Working Group, and as a Board member of the Willamette Falls Heritage Area Coalition.

I was also appointed by the Governor to the WF Locks Task Force this past year, and I would like to thank Representative Parrish for her participation and leadership on that Task Force.

In part because the Locks are located on the river bank of West Linn, West Linn has agreed to take the lead role representing the cities interest in the future Decision Making Group (DMG) of the proposed Locks Commission under SB 256, which will work closely with the Corps on the disposition studies and other analyses, as was recommended by the Locks Task Force.

The Locks represent a significant historic resource in this unique river corridor setting, and they are an essential part of the history of our city, the lower Willamette Valley and Metro region, the State of Oregon, and the nation really.

These Locks provide great opportunities for our cities to expand economic development through renewed commerce and trade, through tourism and through enhanced recreation for Oregonians and visitors of this great region.

To address these valued interests, West Linn is working with our citizens, tribal representatives, surrounding cities, businesses, government entities and many others to revitalize the Willamette Falls area and the river corridor activity from Portland upstream to Salem and beyond. We believe that a functioning Locks system is critical to this work and vision for the future.



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The canal and Locks could also play an invaluable role in the event of a magnitude 9.0 Cascadia earthquake, which is not a matter of if, but when it occurs.

The severity of impacts to our region from a Cascadia earthquake will likely be very significant and the recovery time lengthy (potentially months to years). Of particular concern is the loss of vital infrastructure, including our roadways and bridges.

Late in 2015, I led a group of regional Mayors of the cities surrounding the lower Willamette River to reach out to the Governor to urge recognition of this neglected asset (The Locks) that could play an invaluable role in emergency recovery for the region.

While the Oregon Resiliency Plan prioritizes seismic retrofit of the I-5 corridor in the event of a major earthquake, the route that may be accessible the quickest is the Willamette River itself. The key to having this emergency route available is the WF Locks, joining the upper and lower Willamette River.

As you consider these efforts to repair and reopen the Locks, we request that you keep in mind the related recommendations of the Oregon Resiliency Plan, and the prospect that restoration of the Locks provides an important emergency response and commercial route for community rebuilding and recovery following a major earthquake.

To accomplish our collective objectives, it's important to see that the Locks are transferred from the Corps to another entity that makes most sense to ensure that once they are repaired and reopened, the Locks continue to be maintained and remain operational in an efficient, sustainable, and cost-effective manner. This will be the task of the future Locks Commission to under SB 256.

We trust this process to help secure a better future for all of the communities along the Willamette River and for the entire State, and we appreciate this committee's efforts to advance this vision serving our emergency needs, and the many other valued local and regional interests.

Thank you for your time and considerations on this important issue, and I'm happy to answer any questions if I can.

Respectfully,

Russell B. Axelrod
Mayor
City of West Linn