From: Henry A. Balensifer III
To: JWMCC Exhibits
Cc: Daniel Vizzini
Subject: City of Warrenton Letter Supporting SB 5530
Date: Friday, May 19, 2017 10:17:23 AM

Please accept this testimony on behalf of the City of Warrenton for today's hearing on SB5530.

DATE: May 19, 2017

TO: Joint Ways and Means Capital Construction Subcommittee

FROM: Henry A. Balensifer III
Mayor
City of Warrenton

SUBJECT: Support for SB5530:
(Section 2) $10 Million for IFA Levee Assistance Program
(Section 3) $11 Million for Regional Solutions RIF

Warrenton's Size

The City of Warrenton has 10 miles of levees protecting roughly 5,300 residents, 2,500 properties, and the primary commercial hub of Clatsop County. Our airport, the Coast Guard Sector Columbia River and Air Station Astoria, our fish processors, our medical clinics, lumber mill, and vast majority of our residents all live behind and rely on levees to protect them from flooding.

Cost of Levee Certification

Our levees have never failed. We maintain them as best we can with the staff we have. For a long time, our residents were able to obtain affordable flood insurance under $500 for a single family home. Some now report having to pay over $3,000 due to recent National Flood Insurance Program changes and depletion of the National Flood Insurance Trust Fund due to East and Gulf Coast hurricanes. The only way to reduce the insurance rates for our citizens is to certify our levees.

Hurricane Katrina specifically changed the way the federal government looked at levees. This changed standards and the level of assistance cities would receive from the federal government in keeping their levees certified and accredited. As a result, our levees must come to the new standard and are not certified. We are actively investing in working towards certifying our levees, but the costs are high.

Warrenton must find a way to fund the geotechnical and engineering assessments of our levees, which are estimated to cost approximately $4 million, and depending on what is

discovered, the capital cost of levee improvements are estimated as high as $16 million more. For reference, the city of Warrenton, despite being the fastest growing city in the county, only received $744,000 in property taxes this fiscal year. Due to the cost of bonding for a required new wastewater treatment plant, our city has only $5,322,000 left in bonding capacity. Our stormwater fund, which funds tidegate and levee improvements has $588,000. Our citizens fund police officers, libraries and the construction of our city hall and fire station through tax levies.

Overall, it is clear. Warrenton is doing all it can to pursue levee accreditation, but it cannot do it on its own, when the cost to improve our levees is nearly the same amount as our entire annual operating budget.

Current Project Status

We are currently working with Regional Solutions to secure loans to begin work on a geotechnical analysis of our levees, which we expect will cost $1 million. In the meantime our city engineer is working with utility and property owners to properly manage or remove encroachments; power poles, garages, fences, docks etc; that have intruded into to the levee. Warrenton was fortunate to be able to use the Oregon National Guard to help rehab a section of levee that had settled and were able bring the levee back up to its original elevation. We are coordinating with Clatsop County Diking District #11, which is located outside the city but is nonetheless part of our flood protection system, and are currently working to annex their section of levee into City of Warrenton jurisdiction so we can bring them up to accredited status along with the rest of the system. We are also working with ODOT to address Highway 101-Business which is actually a low spot in our levee system.

While we understand we are not guaranteed any of the funds in this bill, we just want a fair chance to be able to relieve the significant burden of improving our levees.

I strongly urge your support for SB5530 . Thank you for your time and consideration.

Henry A. Balensifer III
Mayor
City of Warrenton
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