



Testimony by City of Wilsonville Mayor Julie Fitzgerald Supporting an Amended SB 5534, Capitol Construction Funding Bill

Strategic Use of State Funds to Leverage Federal Infrastructure Investment for Proposed Public Corporation to Reopen the Willamette Falls Locks

Scheduled for public hearing on May 7, 2021, before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction

Co-Chairs Girod and Holvey, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the City of Wilsonville City Council, I am testifying in strong support of an amended SB 5534 that would provide the proposed Willamette Falls Locks Authority with an initial State investment through bonded lottery proceeds. The City supports an amendment for “Willamette Falls Locks Restoration - \$14 million” in bonding authority as leverage for additional federal funds.

The legislatively chartered Willamette Falls Locks Commission, created by SB 256 of 2017, has recommended to the Oregon Legislative Assembly to create the Willamette Falls Locks Authority as a state-chartered public corporation via HB 2564 this legislative session. Creation of a State-related entity is an essential first step in facilitating the ownership transfer of the Locks from the federal government via the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (US ACE) to the State of Oregon. Transfer of the ownership of the Locks and a state/regional commitment to long-term maintenance that leverages federal funds provides the opportunity to repair and reopen the Locks to river travel.

In the Draft Disposition Study issued by the US ACE in May 2017, the Corps indicated a preference for transfer of the Locks to another entity or cementing the Locks shut permanently, foreclosing any future options for use. Reopening the Locks is crucial to maintaining a key river transportation infrastructure connecting the lower and upper portions of the Willamette River.

Passage of an amended SB 5534 with a Locks restoration budget allotment sends a strong message of reinforcement to Congress and the federal government that the State of Oregon is serious about reopening the Locks, and provides the State an opportunity to leverage substantial federal infrastructure funding for preliminary repairs for reopening the Locks.

The City of Wilsonville is one of three Willamette River cities appointed by the legislature to serve on the Willamette Falls Locks Commission. Wilsonville has vested interests along with other public- and private-sector stakeholders in reopening and sustainably operating the Locks, which significantly impact the recreational, tourism and commercial economy of the region, and provide a non-roadway mode of transportation crucial for recovery after the projected Cascadia 9.0 seismic event. Closure of the Locks since 2011 has placed a severe hardship on commercial, recreational and tribal river users, including long-time employer Wilsonville Concrete, Inc., and Marine Industrial Construction, LLC, which used the Locks for 129 years of commerce.

The City of Wilsonville respectfully requests your support for a budget allotment of \$14 million in restoration funds for the Willamette Falls Locks Authority in SB 5534. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Julie Fitzgerald'.

Julie Fitzgerald, Mayor
City of Wilsonville