



CITY OF PENDLETON

February 26, 2021

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Senate Committee on Housing & Development
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Senate Bill 622

Chair Jama Members of the Committee,

Levees were built throughout the 20th century to help reduce the risk of flooding on lands adjacent to oceans, rivers, and streams. In Oregon, there are well over one thousand miles of levees spread out across the state. In fact, most of you have levees in your districts, if not very close by. These levees were built in urban and rural areas alike, from Burns to Klamath Falls, Pendleton to Portland, Coos Bay to Warrenton, and everywhere in between. Unfortunately, in most of these communities, local jurisdictions struggle to keep up with the necessary maintenance, let alone completing the work required to bring the levees up to modern day standards and comply with shifting federal safety standards for levees.

In 2015, the Oregon State Legislature recognized the importance of levee infrastructure by creating a levee-related loan fund under the Special Public Works Fund (SPWF) of Business Oregon's Infrastructure Finance Authority (IFA). Although the loan fund proved immensely helpful to the jurisdictions that were able to finance a loan, many were unable to take advantage of the funding because they could not afford to pay back a loan over time, even at the IFA's modest interest rates. So, in 2019, the State Legislature created the Levee Grant Program and allocated \$15 million in lottery bond sales to the fund (HB 5030). Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the State was unable to issue lottery bonds in 2020 so no funding has been made available through this program. Meanwhile, levee projects remain incomplete, putting more residents and businesses at risk.

Many communities are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to apply for this grant funding so they can afford to make critical improvements to their flood safety infrastructure. House Bill 2885 allocate \$10 million in net proceeds from lottery bond sales to the Levee Grant Fund to support the planning and execution of levee improvement projects along with levee investigations to identify their adequacy for federal certification and accreditation.

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Sadly, there are too many examples of what happens when our levees cannot withstand the floodwaters they are meant to hold back. In February 2020, City of Pendleton had the equivalent of a 250-year flood event based on an estimated Umatilla River flow of 28,900 cubic feet per second (CFS) flowing through our community. This event occurred due to 13-feet or so of snowpack in the Blue Mountains and a storm cell that dropped 4-inches of rainfall within 24 hours. The day of the event, Weather Service forecast about 10,000 CFS for around 1 pm, or a typical 10-year channel flushing event. Unfortunately, this somewhat isolated storm cell stalled over the Blue Mountains. Weather Service continued to provide updates during the day and by 4 pm, the Riverside area of our community was flooded. River was still rising and crested just before 10 pm that evening. This event caused extreme flooding for communities and properties in the Umatilla River and Walla Walla River Basins, and those in-between.

Our community has two US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) constructed levees. City of Pendleton is the sponsor of the Pendleton Zone 1 Levee protecting our downtown area. Umatilla County Water Control District #1 (WCD #1) is the sponsor of the Pendleton Zone 2 Levee protecting the City's wastewater treatment & resource recovery facility, an industrial area of City, and farm land located downstream of our City near the unincorporated community of Rieth.

Pendleton Zone 1 Levee was constructed in the 1930s and updated in the late 1950s to accommodate a 25,000 CFS flow event. This levee system survived the 250-year flood event with minimal armoring damage, some interior seepage, and a small flood fight from a levee penetration indicated to be abandoned. The small flood fight took about 2 hours to seal off flow and some interior flooding occurred affecting a few businesses and residences near this location.

Pendleton Zone 1 Levee is maintained with funding from the City's Sewer Fund. This levee is regularly inspected and is in the USACE Rehabilitation and Inspection Program. As such, the levee was fully funded by the USACE for damage repairs from the flood event. In January 2021, USACE completed their repairs to the Pendleton Zone 1 Levee.

Pendleton Zone 2 Levee did not fare well and suffered extensive damage. Record drawings from 1956 show this levee was constructed for a 16,400 CFS flow event with 1-foot of freeboard for rolling debris. Please note the highest record of flow, before February 2020, through Pendleton was 15,500 CFS in 1965. Damages included multiple breach points by flows leaving the channel as well as reentering the channel, along with high erosion along the lateral length of the levees. City's wastewater treatment & resource recovery facility was discharging effluent on the interior of the levee protecting the facility. The facility was also inundated due to high groundwater getting into the collection system.

Two employers located in the industrial area levee were impacted with about 4-feet of water surging through their businesses. This had impact to about 400 employees working at the two businesses and their recovery costs were in the millions of dollars. City lost a portion of its sewer main line and roadway near the main breach. City did not wait for funding to come to us to initiate repairs. With the event occurring February 6, 2020, City staff were in Salem at the



Governor's office on Monday, February 10, 2020 with a request for funding assistance of \$1.8 million to cover levee repairs. City of Pendleton and our businesses are forever grateful to the State of Oregon for providing \$1.8 million in grant funding to initiate repairs. We issued an emergency declaration on Friday, February 7, 2020 and had force accounts in place under State requirements with our contractor mobilized to the site on February 13, 2020. Work on the main levee and breaches were completed by April 30, 2020 to be ready for potential spring run-off high flows.

As we progressed with levee repairs, we discovered the Pendleton Zone 2 Levee was removed from the USACE Rehabilitation and Inspection Program (RIP) in 2011. As such, it was not eligible for COE funding of repairs and City discovered that Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) would only cover debris removal due to the levee having been built previously with federal funding and moving out of the USACE RIP.

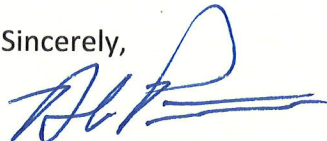
Overall repairs to the levee system were recently completed in December 2020. We are still working with FEMA and Umatilla County Commissioners representing WCD #1 on eligible repair costs for reimbursement consideration. These costs are only related to non-levee damages, such as our sewer main and industrial road repairs, along with debris removal. In addition, we will be initiating discussions with Umatilla County about sponsorship of the Pendleton Zone 2 Levee System and begin the arduous process of hopefully returning it to the USACE RIP.

WCD #1 currently has a balance of about \$6,000. This falls short of the costs to return the levee system back to the RIP. Currently underway with FEMA grant funding is the beginning of a 3- to 5-year basin remapping project for revision to Federal Flood Insurance Rating Maps (FIRMs). Additional interest has been expressed by Riverside Water Control District to invest in development of a levee system to protect the area that flooded in February 2020. This WCD also does not have the resources to begin this process.

With grant dollars available for flood safety projects, more communities will be able to get to work planning and constructing these critical public safety projects. This will reduce the risk of flooding across Oregon and provide important protection to people, property, businesses, and jobs, as well as parks, watersheds, and native fish and wildlife around our state.

Thank you for your previous support of levee operators and communities across Oregon. Please direct \$10 million in lottery bond sales to the Levee Grant Fund. This is a much-needed resource for critical flood safety infrastructure throughout our state. Please accept my support on behalf of the greater Pendleton community.

Sincerely,



Bob Patterson, PE

Public Works Director

Levee Sponsor Representative: Pendleton Zone 1 Levee

