



Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Capital Construction

February 16, 2024

Dear Senator Girod, Representative Holvey, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of The RIVER's request for support from the Oregon State Legislature.

In September 2020, the McKenzie Valley was devastated by the Holiday Farm Fire. But from the ashes, we are rising. Of the 574 homes lost in the blaze, about 100 are rebuilt and others are awaiting construction. Rebuilding, re-establishing, re-trusting is an individual, slow, and painful process. Our vision is to rebuild better. The fire has imbued us all with the sense of gratitude for this spectacular region we call home. Rebuilding also gives us the opportunity to evaluate the needs and gaps in our community, including lack of various sized meeting and event spaces.

In rebuilding from the fire, a fully developed plan for The RIVER (Regional Intercommunity Venue for Economic Renewal) has emerged. It will replace a church sanctuary destroyed by the fire, but also become much more. The RIVER is a new, nonsectarian 501 (c)3 seeking to provide the region with economic renewal, resurgence, and vitality through multiple venues and community programs. For residents, The RIVER is a hub for local business partnerships, all-weather recreation, entertainment, and shared resources, revitalizing our community's spirit. Furthermore, The RIVER will serve as a self-sustaining Red Cross-qualified, disaster relief center. The only one in a 100-mile rural corridor. Spanning 25,000 square feet – able to support McKenzie residents in times of need, showcasing our resilience.

The RIVER will provide economic renewal, resurgence, and vitality in two important ways. 1) The RIVER, as an organization, raises money through philanthropy that will leverage sustaining and appreciating earned revenues that are then invested into the local community through local grant offerings for other reemerging entities. 2) The RIVER, as a regional state-of-the-art destination event venue, will generate earned revenues by drawing tourists and business travelers into the region for conferences, creative arts, retreats, workshops, and myriad other special events. At the same time, the 340-seat center will act as a vital rallying point for the community, serving as a town hall, and point of contact for connecting people to resources that meet social, recreational, inspirational, and developmental needs as they rebuild their lives.

We are grateful for consideration from the Oregon State Legislature of this \$2.5M request for the construction of The RIVER venue to leverage a \$2.5M federal request also under consideration in 2024. The prospect of public support has already leveraged \$1.8M towards a goal of \$2.5M in foundation and private philanthropy.

Sincerely,

Douglas Farrington
Executive Director