



1000 Friends of Oregon
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April 14, 2025

Via Email

Multnomah County Hearings Officer
Multnomah County Community Services, Land Use Planning
1600 SE 190th Avenue
Portland OR 97233-5910

Dear Hearings Officer:

1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit, membership organization that works with Oregonians to support livable urban and rural communities, protect family farms, forests and natural areas, and provide transportation and housing choices. We offer the following comments for your consideration in the matter related to proposal by the City of Portland Water Bureau to develop and operate a drinking water filtration facility, communications tower and related transmission pipelines on lands zoned for agricultural use (Case File T3-2022-16220). The filtration plant would be located at the eastern end of SE Carpenter Road with transmission facilities extending through agricultural lands connecting to the Bull Run system.

BACKGROUND

The proposed facilities would be located in an area that is highly suitable for agriculture and that has been in agricultural production for decades. Most of the area contains prime or other high-value agricultural soils. Much of the immediate area contains Class II soils, some of the best agricultural soils in the United States. It is also important to note that these capability ratings are regardless of irrigation. The area soils are high quality with or without irrigation.

This area is dominated by the production of nursery/greenhouse products. In terms of production value, nursery and greenhouse production is ranked first amongst all Oregon crops, producing just over \$1.32 billion in 2022. This accounts for about 22% of all Oregon agricultural production value. According to the last USDA Census of Agriculture (2022) the market value of agricultural products sold in the county was \$95,892,000. This was an increase of over 29% from the previous Census. It is significant that Multnomah County, the most urban county in Oregon, is also the smallest county in land area yet it is ranked as the 5th most productive county in terms of nursery production in the state and 63rd in the United States. To better understand the value of agriculture in Multnomah County, it is instructive to note that the

Since our founding in 1974, we have worked with Oregonians to enhance our quality of life by building livable urban and rural communities, protecting family farms and forests, and conserving natural areas.

production value per acre of land in farms is \$3426.80. Marion County, the state's leading agricultural county produces \$3,174.88 per acre of land in farms.¹

REVIEW CRITERION

The Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA) remand focuses on the following review criterion found in MCC 39.7515(B).

"§ 39.7515 APPROVAL CRITERIA

In approving a Community Service use, the approval authority shall find that the proposal meets the following approval criteria ****

(B) Will not adversely affect natural resources[.]”

This remand is very plain and clear. LUBA clearly found that the plain text of MCC 39.7515(B) demonstrates that the county unmistakably decided to regulate natural resources beyond those included in the county's Goal 5 inventory.

Multnomah County defines “natural resources” as:

...functioning natural systems, such as wetlands or streams, wildlife habitat, material in the environment used or capable of being used for some purpose, minerals, fuels, **agricultural resources**, and forests² (emphasis supplied).

We assert that the proposed development would adversely impact agricultural natural resources, both within the boundaries of the subject tract and the surrounding area.

ADVERSE IMPACTS

Primary agricultural resources, key to viable operations, include 1) land (as an individual farm and as critical mass to support the larger industry), 2) land with quality soils, 3) water, and 4) the ability to operate efficiently and effectively unimpeded by nonfarm land uses. Within the boundaries of the subject tract, the proposed development would convert 93.49 acres of land historically used for high-value crop production. This tract contains high-value farmland as defined in state law, including prime soils as defined by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The integrity of the site, that is the ability to operate, enabled the previous farm operator to conduct a productive, viable operation with little or no conflict from area nonfarm land uses. Larger tracts of agricultural land, such as the subject tract, with high integrity to operate unimpeded, are

¹ 2022 Census of Agriculture, Oregon State and County Data Volume 1, Geographic Area Series, Part 37, USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service

² Multnomah County Staff Report on Remand, page 8

rare in this area. In order to expand and grow their operations, farmers depend on the ability to rent, lease or purchase sites such as the subject tract.

CONCLUSION

Agricultural lands in Multnomah County play and maintain a significant role in Oregon's rich natural resource base. Multnomah County provides all the key elements, including a critical mass of farms, to maintain a viable, thriving nursery and greenhouse industry.

The proposed development would adversely impact natural resources as defined by Multnomah County by allowing a nonfarm development to convert highly productive agricultural **soils** and agricultural **land** to a nonfarm land use. As proposed, operation of the water treatment facility would displace, cover, and convert nearly 95 acres of agricultural natural resources for a facility that serves urban residents and would be better on many counts if sited within an urban growth boundary.

1000 Friends of Oregon asserts that Multnomah County should determine that the location of a public utility serving an urban population on high-value soils and farmland adversely affects natural resources as defined by the County and as a result, requests that this proposed nonfarm development be denied.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments for your consideration. Please enter our comments into the record of this case.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" and last name "Johnson" clearly legible.

Jim Johnson
Working Lands Policy Director³

³ Jim Johnson is a recognized expert on agriculture and agricultural land use issues. His career has included nearly 28-years as the Land Use and Water Planning Coordinator at the Oregon Department of Agriculture, Farm and Forest Coordinator at the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, Farm and Forest Lands Planner at the Columbia River Gorge Commission and several years as a county planner.



LUP Hearings <lup-hearings@multco.us>

Comments Case File T3-2022-16220

1 message

Jim Johnson <jim@friends.org>
To: LUP-Hearings@multco.us

Mon, Apr 14, 2025 at 11:47 AM

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Dear Hearings Officer

Please find attached comments from 1000 Friends of Oregon related to the remand hearing for a proposal by City of Portland Water Bureau to develop and operate a drinking water filtration facility, communications tower and related transmission pipelines on lands zoned for agricultural use (Case File T3-2022-16220).

Jim Johnson
Working Lands Policy Director
1000 Friends of Oregon
971.442.1747



The preservation of a maximum amount of the limited supply of agricultural land is necessary to the conservation of the state's economic resources and the preservation of such land in large blocks is necessary in maintaining the agricultural economy of the state and for the assurance of adequate, healthful and nutritious food for the people of this state and nation.

---Oregon Agricultural Land Use Policy, ORS 215.243

**PD Water Filtration Remand Comments.docx**

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