

GREEN JOBS

Renewable diesel fuel refinery will be union built and operated

Construction could begin in early 2022 at Port Westward near Clatskanie.

By Don McIntosh

NEXT Renewable Fuels — a Houston-based company formed in 2016 to develop a renewable diesel refinery on the West Coast — has renewed its commitment to employ union labor on a proposed \$1.6 billion plant outside Clatskanie, Oregon — both while it's under construction and when it begins operating.

The facility is to be constructed on a 90-acre parcel leased for 30 years from the Port of Clatskanie at Port Westward Industrial Park in Columbia County. It would employ 800 workers during construction and more than 200 workers once it's operating.

In 2019 NEXT Renewable Fuels first signed memoranda of understanding with Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council and the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters, and a separate card check agreement with United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555. In March 2021 the company announced that those two agree-



A site plan of the renewable diesel refinery proposed for the Port Westward Industrial Park.

ments have been renewed. For building trades unions, once a general contractor is selected to build the facility, the next step would be to negotiate a project labor agreement (PLA) spelling out the commitment to use union labor in construction.

Meanwhile, in its agreement with UFCW Local 555, NEXT Renewable Fuels commits to remain neutral in any future union organizing efforts for operating staff at the plant, and allow union organizers to hold

meetings on site during non-working hours. Local 555, in return, commits not to disparage NEXT Renewable Fuels or picket on the site.

"We are very excited to be working with labor," NEXT Renewable Fuels executive chairman Christopher Efird told the *Labor Press* by phone.

Efird said he and his co-founder looked for potential sites from Lazaro Cardenas, Mexico, all the way to Alaska, and chose Port Westward for its deep water port, access to

rail, and its proximity to West Coast demand centers like California.

Efird said NEXT Renewable Fuels has applied for all its major permits and hopes to have approval by January and begin construction in the first calendar quarter of 2022.

Demand for diesel from non-petroleum sources is being driven by Oregon and California low carbon fuel standards, says John Mohlis, a former leader of the Oregon Building Trades Council

who's now employed by NEXT Renewables as a labor and government relations consultant on the Port Westward project.

When the plant begins operating in 2024, NEXT Renewable Fuels says it will convert used cooking oils, animal tallow, seed oil and soy oil into what it calls "Advanced Green Diesel," also known as renewable diesel.

Unlike biodiesel — a fuel additive with a limited shelf-life and poor performance in cold temperatures — renewable diesel is chemically identical to diesel derived from petroleum. That means it can directly substitute for petroleum-based diesel with no need for separate tanks or other infrastructure. The plant will also produce a small amount of bio-derived propane and naphtha. Efird said the raw materials and the finished product will move in and out of the port by ship, while bits and pieces used in production will arrive by rail. Though this would be the first project for NEXT Renewable Fuels, similar facilities are in operation elsewhere, including a Valero refinery in Norco, Louisiana.

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