

LNG Project Cancelled!

Oregon LNG, the company planning the liquified natural gas terminal in Warrenton, Oregon and the pipeline that would bring natural gas across the state, has withdrawn from the project.

News spread quickly across the internet on the afternoon of Friday, April 15, as local activists rejoiced in the defeat of the project that would have included the installation of a 36 inch pipeline across Columbia County, traversing forest land and crossing salmon bearing rivers and streams in numerous places.

"Power to the little people!" said one local activist in a message on Facebook announcing the successful defeat of the project.

Oregon LNG had proposed building a huge terminal in Warrenton, where fracked natural gas would be converted to liquefied natural gas and shipped overseas to Asian markets. The terminal was proposed to be built in a sensitive area on the Columbia River and opponents claimed it would have disrupted commercial and recreational fishing. The pipeline would have crossed Rock Creek just miles above the intake to the City of Vernonia water supply.

Concerns about safety and local emergency

services ability to deal with a major disaster was a major rallying point for local opposition, along with concerns about environmental damage during construction and the use of eminent domain to gain easements. Local citizens joined forces with Columbia Riverkeepers, an environmental protection group, to oppose the project, traveling to Salem to take part in a rally at the capital. They also continued to hold local meetings to strategize and stay updated on the project.

"We've waited a long time for this," said Brett VandenHeuvel, Executive Director of Columbia Riverkeeper. "Waited is the wrong word. No one was sitting around waiting. We fought a long time to earn this result. That's more accurate."

The City of Vernonia passed a resolution opposing the project. State Senator Betsy Johnson, State Representative Brad Witt, and U.S. Representative Ron Wyden had all spoken out publicly against the project.



"I shared the concerns that the Oregon LNG project would have had negative environmental and economic impacts, and I am relieved that local voices prevailed," said Wyden in a statement.

The project had already been rejected several times during the local permitting process. The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners had denied allowing the pipeline to cross their territory and on March 8 a land use hearing in Warrenton determined the project did not meet local code. A similar project at Jordan Cove in southern Oregon was recently denied by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).

"This was not an orchestrated campaign," said VandenHeuvel. "This was a campaign where ideas flowed around kitchen tables and pastures, and where farmers and fishermen stood side by side with climate activists."

School District to Explore New Bond

The Vernonia School Board took two actions at their April 14 meeting in an effort to alleviate lingering debt from the construction of the new school campus.

The Board voted to approve Resolution 1516-05 authorizing the refinancing of the current General Obligation Bond that voters approved in 2009. That 25 year bond of \$1.90 per thousand was issued in 2010 for the capital construction of the school facility.

The Board followed that approval of the refinancing with a second action, authorizing the Superintendent to gather information for a possible new bond election in November 2016.

The refinancing will save taxpayers approximately \$600,000 over the life of the bond, which is scheduled to retire in 2035. The refinancing does not create any revenue for the School District.

The School District currently has over \$5 million of debt left from

the school construction project. Superintendent Aaron Miller told the Board the annual debt service is approximately \$500,000 per year through 2021 and will not be completely paid off until 2029. The debt comes from funding the District had to borrow to complete the construction. Miller says payment of the debt service will need to come from the general operating fund of the District and will lead to severe cuts in personnel or days the District operates.

Earlier in the meeting Finance Officer Dawn Plewes told the Board that \$230,000 would need to come out of the general fund, which had not been budgeted for, to pay the balance of the debt service for this year.

A somber Miller noted that fundraising efforts that have been used in the past to pay the debt service are no longer a viable option. "The initiatives

we've been working towards have been less and less productive," said Miller. "This is the year those payments have caught up to us. Unless we find a way to pay this completely off it's going to be an impact on the general fund from here forward."

Miller has suggested a second bond measure to raise the funds needed to pay off the debt for the school. With the bond refinancing, the new bond would bring the obligation to the taxpayers back to the original \$1.90 per thousand taxpayers approved in 2009 and extend the obligation for several more years.

Miller presented several options to the School Board, who took their second action of the evening and authorized Miller to begin exploring a second bond.

Construction to Close Pebble Creek Road

For the second summer in a row, the Columbia County Road Department will be closing Pebble Creek Road to replace a bridge.

Construction on the bridge over Pebble Creek, located just .80 miles from the junction of Highway 47, began on April 18 with short duration closures utilizing flaggers.

Pebble Creek Road will be closed from June 11 through September 30 for replacement of the bridge structure. A detour route will be set up, sending traffic on Highway 47 around to McDonald Road. Construction will be primarily completed by September 30, with a contract completion date of October 30 for all work.

Columbia County Voters Have Big Decisions

The upcoming May 17 primary election has several important races and issues that Columbia County voters will be deciding.

Columbia County Commissioner Positions 1 and 3 are both up for election in this primary with five candidates running for Earl Fisher's Position 1 seat. Fisher has chosen not to run for re-election, so Columbia County will be sure to have at least one new member on the Board of Commissioners. Running for Fisher's seat are Susan Conn, Brady Preheim, Joel Yarbor, Margaret Magruder, and Wayne Mayo.

At Position 3, long term incumbent Tony Hyde faces a challenge from newcomer Alex Tardiff.

Vernonia's Voice will host a political forum "Meet the Candidates" with candidates running for County Commissioner, on Monday, April 25 at 7:00 pm at the Cabin in Vernonia. The public is invited to attend.

Columbia County voters will

also have an opportunity to decide the future of the Columbia County Rider transportation system. The County has placed a measure on the ballot that would form a special transportation district to operate the transit system. The measure would authorize a tax rate of \$0.23 per \$1,000 of assessed value for ten years. The transportation district would be governed by a newly elected, seven-member Board of Directors, which are also on the ballot in this primary election; all seven candidates for the Board of Directors are running unopposed. The transportation district will include all of Columbia County except the cities of Clatskanie and Deer Island which declined to be included.

Sheriff Jeff Dickerson and Treasurer Jennifer Cuellar-Smith are both running unopposed for re-election.

The race for County Commissioner Position 1 is crowded and may end up going to a run off in November if no candidate receives more than 50 per-

cent of the vote.

Susan Conn is currently serving as a St. Helens City Councilor and is the Council Liaison to the St. Helens Economic Development Corporation. She also serves as a board member for the Columbia Pacific Economic Development District. She served for seven years on the St. Helens School Board and for 14 years on the Columbia County Commission on Children & Families.

Joel Yarbor of Deer Island is a U.S. Army veteran who served in the Vietnam War. He previously served on the Board of Commissioners for one term from 1994-98. He has cited jobs and bringing more industry to Columbia County as a main concern and focus of his campaign. He currently works raising and training race horses.

Brady Preheim of Scappoose is a former member of the South Columbia County Chamber of Commerce and was involved in helping stop the \$0.08

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