

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing to ask you to recommend against removal of the environmental zoning to allow the construction of the the proposed Pembina Propane Terminal. Barbara Quinn's op ed in the Portland Tribune, part of which I have quoted below, outlines clearly the risks to our community, our local environment, and the planet's climate.

Approval of this terminal would be another step in the wrong direction, work against the City's goals for contributing to the reduction of the greenhouse gasses causing climate change, and create a severe threat to the Columbia River, and to the people in and around the 3-4 mile blast zone.

Please recommend maintaining the environmental zoning.

Sincerely,

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My View: Pembina plan puts safety on the line

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The propane terminal proposed by the Canadian company Pembina Pipeline Corp. would locate 10 large propane tanks holding 33.6 million gallons on the banks of the Columbia River in a flood and earthquake hazard zone (A primer on Pembina terminal project, Jan. 22).

According to chief scientist Ian Madin of the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries, if an earthquake of 6.0 or stronger struck the vicinity, it could cause catastrophic ground movement and liquefaction.

Such a ground failure could, in turn, cause structural damage to the tanks, pipeline or propane-filled rail cars. A leak of toxic, highly explosive propane vapors would be extremely dangerous, especially in combination with the large amount of fuel stored at the site. A mere spark from a cell phone or train wheel could ignite leaked fumes with catastrophic results.

Rather than offering solid information to the most affected communities, Pembina has not responded to the request for the blast zone size in a worst-case scenario. Instead, it has offered an estimate based on other sites — 300 yards, or about three or four blocks in all directions.

In contrast, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates the blast zone for a 125,000-gallon propane tank to be more than a half-mile. The total capacity at the Portland site would be almost 30 times that, so a two- to three-mile blast zone is a conservative estimate — engulfing residences in the St. Johns neighborhood and West Hayden Island, as well as Kelley Point and Pier parks, the Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area, and the entire span of the Columbia River well into Vancouver, Wash.

These residents deserve more transparency from Pembina and our own political leaders.

Besides the safety issue, there also is the problem of high carbon dioxide and methane emissions

from the processing, shipping and burning of great quantities of propane that would add to the growing problem of climate warming. Pembina has portrayed propane as a transition fuel even though it is a hydrocarbon byproduct of gas and oil processing. In this case, it is obtained by hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, a practice that destroys groundwater quality and poses “significant health risk to both human and non-human life,” according to Physicians for Social Responsibility.

The fracking process also causes the release of large amounts of methane gas, which is even more damaging to the atmosphere than carbon dioxide. This proposal clearly expands fossil fuel use.

The decision to accept or reject this proposal is where climate change rhetoric meets on-the-ground action, and where the choice is made between fossil fuels or renewable energy. It’s where Pembina and political leaders opt to practice inclusiveness and transparency with the community — or not.