

February 15, 2024

Joint Committee on Capital Construction  
Oregon State Legislature  
Salem, Oregon

To the Honorable Members of the Capital Construction Committee:

My name is Edward Tonkin and I am writing in support of both the Capital request and Bond Issuance request on behalf of the Hillsboro Hops Baseball organization. I am a lifelong Oregonian, born in Portland and have lived my entire life here.

As you are no doubt aware, Oregon as a State and Portland, in particular, as a city have suffered some very negative press the last several years. The press has not only been local but unfortunately national as well. Witness the recent national news broadcast of Portland's having to declare a state of emergency due to the fentanyl crisis stemming from the state's decision to decriminalize drugs.

We live in the most beautiful state in the country. Our abundant natural resources provide every type of environment anyone could wish for including but not limited to the amazing Oregon coast, the mountains, the central Oregon desert, eastern Oregon with the stunning Willowa mountains and more. I could go on and on. Almost every form of recreation is available in this wondrous State.

My point in saying the above is that people should be breaking our doors down wanting to move here to Oregon; to raise their families here, to open businesses here, to recreate here. Economic development would become robust, jobs would be created and the tax base would grow. All this would allow for more resources to help fix the problems we have of homelessness, mental illness treatment, drug addiction and the like.

Sadly, this is not the case and we seem to be a dwindling population of the type that adds investment and productivity to our State. In large part this is due to the growing negative press and portrayal of Oregon as a troubled place. We can change this perception; you can help change this perception.

What I have described above I put on the "negative" side of the ledger. Now we, and with your help and support, have the opportunity to put something on the "positive" side of the ledger. We need more positivity in our communities, in our cities and in our State.

I can say without the slightest doubt, Hillsboro Hops baseball in our community sits squarely in the middle of the positive side of the ledger I spoke of above. It is a jewel in our community. It is something wonderful that people of all ages can enjoy, families can enjoy together and at a very affordable cost; something that doesn't seem to exist in this day and age of professional sports. Our Hops baseball is open to all people and reaches across almost all socio-economic groups.

Let me add another interesting and important fact about Hops baseball in Hillsboro. Several years ago Minor League Baseball went through a complete reorganization. During that process many of the teams around the country lost their affiliation. For lack of a better term they were essentially "cut" or "terminated" from Minor League baseball. Sadly, the Salem-Keizer team was one of those casualties. Hillsboro, on the other hand, was blessed as one of the top Minor League teams in the Minor League organization; recognized for the quality of the organization, the quality of the experience and the positive impact on the community.

What can be better than sitting in a ballpark on a warm summer's evening and enjoying baseball, hot dogs, peanuts and a cold drink and listening to the thump of the baseball hitting the catcher's mitt and the crack of a bat? This is Americana; this is community and this is "pure goodness."

What is at risk here is the the Hops remaining the "Hillsboro Hops." Without the State's funding we are unable to build the new stadium with the amenities required by Minor League baseball in order to keep the team intact and located here. With hard work we have assembled all the necessary funding with the exception of the State funding, to build a beautiful facility and keep the team here. Without the funding, in all probability the team will have to be sold and moved which would generate even more negative publicity. The State funding we are requesting is the final piece of the puzzle to enable the Hops organization to move forward and remain in Hillsboro.

I say "we" in my letter as me and my son are part owners of the team. I'll shed more light on that later but first I want to share a little history with you; baseball in Portland history.

My father, Ron Tonkin, born in Portland in 1931, grew up in Portland and as a kid enjoyed Portland Beaver baseball. In the early days the team played on Vaughan Street. He loved going to the ballpark to watch the Beavers like most young kids did. In 1954 the Beavers moved to Multnomah stadium, which became Civic stadium and is now PGE Park.

The Beavers were affiliated with several various major league teams and in 1978 the Pacific Coast League named the Portland Beavers as one of its expansion teams. The Beavers became a Triple A team, one step below the major league.

In 1979 the then owner threatened to move the team out of Portland. My dad could not stand the idea of not having baseball in Portland and upon hearing this news, put together a small group of owners and purchased the majority stake in the Portland Beavers. Their sole reason for buying the team was to keep baseball in Portland. They recognized that baseball was

important for kids, for families and for the city and it would be a terrible shame to lose it. He wanted to make sure kids had the same experience as he did watching baseball while growing up. The investors had no financial motive in mind. They knew that the investment would be a financial black hole and would provide no financial return and sure enough it did not. From an investment standpoint it made zero sense yet that was not their motive. As native and long time Portlanders they did whatever they could to maintain the baseball team in Portland.

People enjoyed Beaver baseball very much and as the team became more and more promoted by the wunderkind General Manager David Hersh, attendance continued to grow. My dad and his investor friends took great pride, along with the city, in winning the PCL Championship. They also took a tremendous amount of pride in seeing players “graduate” to “The Show,” Major League baseball, many of which had stellar careers. The Hops, too, have seen many of its players move to the major leagues and become star players. Sadly, in 1985, a new owner moved the team out of Portland and to Salt Lake City. Portland was without baseball.

It's been a real blessing to have professional baseball back in our community. The Hillsboro Hops draw much of their attendance from Portland and once again, Portlanders can enjoy baseball.

I alluded to my saying “we” in my message above. That’s because my son Adam and I have put our money where our mouths are. A couple years ago we both invested in The Hops baseball organization. Much like my father and Adam’s grandfather, neither of us expect any kind of return. The organization, while profitable, puts those profits back into the endeavor to continually improve the fan experience. The “return” that we do get is seeing all the smiling faces and people’s enjoyment at the ball park. The ability to sit at the stadium and enjoy baseball while socializing with friends and family and meeting new people is a huge win for us and the satisfaction we derive from knowing we invested and are part of something so good and meaningful in the community is more than enough for us. Seeing the baseball product and fan experience and tremendous amount of happiness generated by Hops baseball is all the return we need.

As far as benefits of having Hillsboro Hops baseball in the community, there are several, some more tangible than others and so many that I could never list all of them. I will list a few that come to mind. Hops baseball generates jobs. Hops baseball provides a feather in our community’s cap. Hops baseball generates taxable income for the State. It helps to drive tourism and hotel revenue with resulting tax. It’s one more attraction for our community and our State. The construction of the new stadium will create jobs in and of itself thereby creating more tax revenue.

Moreover, the plans for the new stadium include making it a wonderful concert venue for people of all ages. Yet another attraction for our community and another way for people to recreate in a cultural manner. In fact, we already have been working with Live Nation, the country’s largest concert and entertainment provider, to ensure a number of performers and acts for the community to enjoy.

Further, the Hops organization provides tremendous community events for all types of organizations and charities. It is very charitable itself donating thousands of dollars to those in need and also assisting efforts which further education. Many evenings are designated for specific groups such as "Pride Night" among many others.

The single largest benefit, however, is the intangible one. It's the effect that baseball has on our community. It's witnessing families and individuals enjoying themselves and baseball at an extremely happy place. People of all ages, young old and in between; people of all ethnicity and races, people of all persuasions having a good time enjoying a baseball game and watching a beautiful fireworks display every Friday home game. Hillsboro Hops baseball is just full of "goodness" all the way around.

You have the chance now to do something that fulfills that "goodness" and which is so meaningful to our community in so many ways. I respectfully urge you to support our request for a Captital Contribution and the issuance of Bonds to support baseball in this community and prevent the loss of something so wonderful.

I assure you that if you come to the ballpark, and we hope that you do, just take a look around and I know you'll feel a great sense of pride that you played a part in keeping Hillsboro Hops baseball alive.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Ed Tonkin  
Portland, Oregon