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February 5, 2025

Attn: Alberta Emerald Foundation Grant Committee

Subject: **Letter of Support for Oilfields High School's Vertical Farm Initiative**

Dear Grant Committee,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Foothills School Division, I am honored to submit this letter in support of Oilfields High School's (OHS) Vertical Farm Initiative (VFI) for consideration under the Alberta Emerald Foundation Grant program. The VFI embodies the values of environmental stewardship and sustainability, empowering students to become active participants in addressing food security while fostering a deeper understanding of responsible land management and innovative agricultural practices.

The Vertical Farm Initiative aligns closely with the Alberta Emerald Foundation's mission to "accelerate environmental excellence by celebrating visionary leadership and sharing best practices through compelling educational narratives". Through this initiative, students not only gain hands-on experience but also contribute to the broader goal of fostering environmental responsibility in their communities. By equipping students with knowledge and actionable skills, the VFI advances the foundation's vision of "a future where all Albertans champion environmental excellence where they live, work, and play".

Evolving from an outdoor garden and a student concern for sustainability in the school, the Vertical Farm Initiative has become a means of addressing the growing need for food security within the local community - providing a sustainable source of fresh produce year-round. As it has expanded, so too has its impact. A testament to this success is the weekly donations made to the local food bank, ensuring that community members have access to nutritious, locally grown food. Through these efforts, students are not only learning about sustainable food production but also experiencing firsthand the social responsibility that comes with environmental stewardship.

Before enrolling in the program, most students had little to no knowledge of vertical farming. By the end of the semester, they are confident in their ability to educate others on the principles of sustainable agriculture. Students host informational tours, providing insights into the program's carbon footprint and the concept of Net Zero Operations. This initiative has proven to be an innovative and

transformative educational opportunity, equipping students with knowledge and skills that are applicable in both academic and real-world contexts. The program actively engages students and the public, ensuring they are equipped with the tools to make informed environmental decisions and contribute to a sustainable future.

Inspired by the Indigenous principle of “the seven generations,” the VFI incorporates responsible land and resource management practices to ensure long-term sustainability. One of the major challenges students have tackled is mitigating crop loss due to pests, a common issue in agricultural production. By implementing a biosecurity header house, they have successfully reduced waste while improving overall productivity. The initiative also promotes sustainability by reducing food waste and enhancing the efficiency of the local food supply chain. Furthermore, the local impact of this initiative extends beyond the school. The fresh produce grown in Diamond Valley is now being supplied to local grocery stores, reducing reliance on externally sourced produce and subsequently lowering transportation and energy costs.

The Vertical Farm Initiative at Oilfields High School exemplifies the values of the Alberta Emerald Foundation Grant by promoting environmental awareness, fostering innovative problem-solving, and making a meaningful contribution to the local community. By engaging students, educators, and the public, this initiative ensures that environmental excellence is celebrated, sustained, and shared for generations to come.

The Board of Trustees of the Foothills School Division strongly supports this initiative and encourages its continued growth and success.

Thank you for your consideration of this impactful program. Please do not hesitate to reach out should you require any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Theresa Letendre." The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

Theresa Letendre
Board Chair, Foothills School Division

