

LU-24-027 IN-PERSON TESTIMONY SUBMITTAL COVER SHEET

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Oral testimony by Peg Herring: 34386 Colorado Lake Drive, Corvallis, OR 97333; 541-760-2370

Thank you, Commissioners, for being here and listening and thinking about this decision.

My name is Peg Herring. I moved to Benton County in 1990. I am an emerita professor at OSU and a member of the Great Old Broads for Wilderness.

Before you chuckle at our funny name, you need to know we are a national organization led by retired professionals who work toward the protection of American landscapes. More than 100 of our members are Benton County residents and we care deeply about the environment of the mid-Willamette Valley.

Earlier this year, we witnessed the Planning Commission hearings, and we learned a lot.

- We learned that Republic Services is under contract to continue to take Benton County trash for another 15 years. Despite what we've been told, the dump will not be closing any time soon.
- We learned that plumes of methane spewing from Coffin Butte are visible from space, but they're mostly undetected by Republic's own monitoring.
- We learned that 93% of the garbage creating that methane comes from 22 other counties, all of them more than happy to off-load their garbage and their responsibilities to Benton County.
- And now Republic says they need to expand, to bring in even more garbage from far away.

What we *didn't* learn from the earlier hearings is:

why on earth would Benton County government agree to this expansion?

Is it the money?

We are not allowed to talk about money. But the people of Benton County have been deceived.

There are pages of testimony in the record that analyze the \$1 million a year *incentive* Republic Services has paid to gain approval for this expansion. However, we learned that Republic is *contractually required* to pay Benton County at least \$2.5 million a year until the year 2040, without an expansion.

Is it a lack of alternatives for our garbage?

There are a lot of economical and environmental alternatives. But we are not allowed to talk about them. And with that, the people of Benton County and our neighboring counties have been deceived.

Again, there are pages of testimony that outline good, available alternatives to a landfill expansion. This includes the County-commissioned workgroup called *Benton County Talks Trash* that has outlined a path to sustainable waste management for the mid-Willamette Valley. We have good, affordable options on the table, *and* 15 years to implement a better alternative for everyone.

So, why are we talking about *expanding* this problem rather than *solving* it?

Perhaps it is because the County's legal advisors have not allowed you, the Benton County Commissioners, to consider past decisions; or future consequences; or the methane spewing from the dump; or the toxic leachate poured into the river; or the money promised or implied; or anything about real alternatives to an ever-expanding regional dump.

The limitations imposed on your ability to think through this decision are arbitrary and ignore relevant context.

Within the narrow limitations of this hearing, we *are allowed to* talk about serious interference with uses on adjacent property. And the Planning Commission heard heart-breaking testimonies of neighbors' properties sold at fire-sale prices because they could no longer function as farms, or businesses, or homes without having breathable air and drinkable water.

These testimonies are in the record, and there will be many more like these if the landfill expands. But we can't talk about that.

But we *are allowed to* talk about serious interference with the character of the area. The Planning Commission heard hours of testimonies about the offensive sight, smell, noise, and pollution from this landfill. These problems will get bigger if the dump gets bigger. But we can't talk about that.

We *are allowed to* talk about undue burden on public services and facilities. And again, the Planning Commission heard powerful testimonies, including from the Adair Village *volunteer* fire department describing the dangers they face when called to fight potentially explosive, methane-fueled dump fires.

But whether the Planning Department staff like it or not, we *must* talk about the undue burden on the people of Benton County.

Planning Committee Chair Nicholas Fowler asked the pointed question: when state and federal agencies responsible for environmental monitoring, are not living up to those responsibilities, doesn't that put an undue burden on county government?

And when a county government is unable to monitor or enforce conditions, doesn't that put an undue burden on county residents?

And when county staff advise Commissioners to dismiss credible evidence collected by those county residents, doesn't that put an undue burden on these hearings to fairly consider all the facts available?

The relevant context of this decision-making process is an expanding source of toxic pollution that reaches far beyond what we can see or smell on adjacent property. An even bigger landfill will bring even bigger problems.

Whatever short-term windfall of money the County thinks it might receive from this deal will not cover the enormous and undue burden the residents of Benton County face now, and will face later, when this landfill eventually closes and requires an expensive environmental cleanup.

We have witnessed 50 years of incremental decisions by Benton County government about expanding Coffin Butte. These were individual decisions that must have seemed small and inconsequential at the time.

But cumulatively, those decisions have added up to an environmental mess that no one planned and no one wants. But here we are.

Please, Commissioners Malone and Shepherd and Chair Wyse, you are the last Commissioners who will have the power to end this long history of bad decisions.

Please use your power to DENY THIS EXPANSION and save Benton County.

Thank you.

In summary: Expansion of the Coffin Butte landfill:

- will seriously interfere with current and future uses on adjacent property within the watershed, air-shed, and view-shed. (Criteria 1)
- will seriously interfere with the character and identity of the area, making Benton County a dump site rather than a destination. (Criteria 1)
- will impose an undue environmental and financial burden on future public improvements, facilities, utilities, and services that might otherwise be made available to the surrounding area. (Criteria 2)
- will violate the spirit and the mandate to shift from Solid Waste Management to Materials Management, a stated goal of Benton County and the State of Oregon. (Criteria 3)