

From: [Elise Yarnell](#)
To: [Coffin Butte Landfill Appeals](#)
Subject: Submitted on Behalf of Fred Penning
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Written Testimony from Fred Penning

Former Member, Benton County Solid Waste Advisory Committee

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Fred Penning, and I previously served on Benton County's Solid Waste Advisory Committee. I've been involved in these conversations for years, and I understand how complex waste management policy can be. But I also know this: expanding Coffin Butte is the most responsible, cost-effective, and environmentally sound path forward—not just for Benton County, but for the region as a whole.

Coffin Butte isn't just a landfill—it's critical infrastructure. It contributes millions annually to Benton County's budget, supporting roads and public safety. It supports nearly 100 local jobs and powers over 4,000 homes each year through renewable energy. It meets environmental standards, captures methane, and invests in modern technology to improve safety and sustainability.

And yet, despite these facts, I see the conversation increasingly dominated by a small, loud group of opponents. I want to make this point clear: **the majority often does not get included in this kind of decision-making—not because they don't care, but because they're working.** They don't have the time or privilege to attend every meeting or write testimony. These are the people who depend on affordable services, steady utility rates, and jobs that facilities like Coffin Butte help provide. We can't continue to let their silence be mistaken for opposition.

This is not a local issue in the narrow sense. Back in 1997, Linn, Benton, and Marion counties came together and agreed to designate Coffin Butte as a regional landfill. That agreement still stands. To now treat this decision as if it only affects Benton County residents is a disservice to the regional collaboration that's kept our waste system stable for decades.

If this expansion is denied, waste will have to be hauled much farther away—at significantly higher cost, with higher emissions, and less local control. Those increased costs won't just show up on balance sheets; they'll hit working families, schools, small businesses, and city budgets. And that burden will land hardest on those who already have the least flexibility to absorb it.

Approving this conditional use permit isn't a forever decision—it's a bridge. It gives us time to responsibly explore alternatives without compromising affordability and reliability right now.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and for considering not just the loudest voices, but also the many who are counting on you quietly, while they go about their lives, work, and families.

Sincerely,

Fred Penning

Former Member, Benton County Solid Waste Advisory Committee

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