

**From:** [WYSE Nancy](#)  
**To:** [Benton Public Comment](#)  
**Subject:** LU-24-027 FW: trash and cash  
**Date:** Tuesday, February 4, 2025 3:57:43 PM

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As Kiko states, we had a conversation on February 1st in the parking lot of Philomath High School immediately following the Merkley-Hoyle Town Hall. He asked several questions about the landfill, which are detailed in this email. I did my best to explain the concept of "ex parte contacts" to him and suggested that he send me (and/or the BOC) an email.

Nancy V. Wyse (She/hers)  
Commissioner

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-----Original Message-----

From: kiko denzer <[kiko@handprintpress.com](mailto:kiko@handprintpress.com)>  
Sent: Tuesday, February 4, 2025 3:40 PM  
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Subject: trash and cash

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Dear Commissioners Wyse, Malone, and Shepherd,

First, thank you, Commissioner Wyse, for taking the time to talk with me after last week's town hall in Philomath.

Per your suggestion, I am sending you some thoughts and concerns regarding our trash, and what we do with it.

From what I have been able to discover, other Oregon counties have proactive plans for managing waste.

In Yamhill County, citizens opposed to the expansion of their regional landfill took the issue to the Land Use Board of Appeals, who agreed with them. They then had to sue the landfill in order to get it to close. Meanwhile, they set a goal for Zero Waste and are actively taking aggressive steps to meet their goal.

Lane County recently announced plans to build and operate the most advanced integrated reuse and recycling facility in the nation.

Polk County is looking into building a waste transfer station, to break their dependence on Coffin Butte Landfill.

Metro Portland decided, years ago, that sending trash to landfills in the Willamette Valley went against their stated values of protecting the environment. Because the Valley supports one of the most productive ag economies in the nation, they decided it was an irrevocably bad idea to dump their trash in the garden where farmers grow their food,

so they took a moral stance to guide their waste policies.

Closer to home, we have obvious problems with the Coffin Butte Landfill.

Benton County planning documents clearly state specific goals for waste management and waste reduction (BCC Ch. 23). The franchise agreement with Republic Services includes those and other environmental goals, but extensive evidence shows that Republic is failing to meet its legal obligations.

Perhaps they are more concerned with financial gain than they are with meeting their goals? There is certainly evidence in that direction as well: In August of '22, Forbes Magazine quoted investment manager Michael Hoffman as saying that garbage “is capital-intensive and [while] it’s not compounding at 20% per year like software...for the big players it’s become an extraordinarily repeatable and inflation-resistant business.” Goals like “waste reduction” don’t generate income as quickly or easily as waste collection and disposal.

Cascade Investments (Bill Gates’ personal holding company), has a 34% stake in Republic’s business. According to Forbes, it earns more than \$200M/year from its investment — profits that are paid by the residents of 1/3 of the state of Oregon; profits that also leave the state, never to return.

Meanwhile, Benton County residents face a future in which we will have to pay all the costs of managing the consequences of storing all the waste collected in Coffin Butte — consequences which include (and will quickly exceed) a host of already well-documented problems:

- dangerous methane leaks (methane, of course, being a potent greenhouse gas, highly flammable and clear and present fire risk in a heavily wooded area),
- continuing release of noxious and dangerous fumes and gases
- millions of gallons of toxic leachate (currently being dumped into our rivers, essentially untreated and full of heavy metals and PFAS (aka “forever chemicals”).)
- arsenic leaching into well water,
- illegally dumped and buried toxic wastes,
- continuing surprise fires

The agreement with Republic Services requires insurance coverage merely equal to the liability coverage for 15 average single family homes. How can this amount cover the consequences of dealing with decades of trash from 1/3 of the entire state? And after the landfill closes, the agreement effectively terminates any liability for the contractor at all! Clearly, the consequences of waste disposal will be borne by the public.

Every citizen generates waste that will need collection and disposal, and every citizen needs a safe, clean, and healthy environment that will protect them against pollution, wildfire, and economic hardship. So it seems only logical that our government has an urgent obligation to serve those needs in the best way possible. Currently, however, we’re hog-tied by a contract that allows an outside, private entity to make undisclosed gains without regard for the damages incurred against the present and future interests of local citizens.

Does such a situation not put us in a profoundly dangerous situation?

My question, then, is simple: If we, as a county, contract for services to meet specific goals, and if the contractor consistently fails to meet those goals, why are we continuing the contract? Especially when there is both precedent and example for better solutions to the overall problem of a “throw-away” society?

It seems to me we need to look beyond the interests of out-of-state entities who convert our trash to their cash. We need to look past the intricacies and minutiae of bureaucracy. We need to serve the immediate and profound needs of all our constituents — all our children, grandchildren, and all future generations.

Obviously, these issues and concerns extend beyond the bounds of the specific agreement with Republic Services, and won’t be answered quickly and/or easily. It will take a long conversation, free of the “interests” of outside parties who have no long-term stake in or commitment to the long-term outcomes. The responsibility is ours.

But as clear as the situation seems to me, it's also clear to me that between citizens and government, we have the capacity to significantly and effectively address the situation so that our descendants will remember us with gratitude, for addressing needs they will have after we are all long dead.

With sincere thanks for your service (and for reading this long email!)

— Kiko Denzer

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