

Testimony in Opposition to the Landfill Expansion, LU-24-027, July 9, 2025

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DATE RECEIVED:	7/9/25
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Good evening, Commissioners. My name is Mark Henkels, and I'm a resident of Benton County. Thank you for your commitment to this long and difficult process.

I am speaking today in opposition to LU-24-027. Here are two concerns that I believe have not been addressed clearly enough in this process.

First: Waste Disposal Increases Will Shorten The Landfill's Life and Increase Impacts on the Community

Republic Services' own diagrams tell the story. Once the expansion occurs, they propose to raise the intake from the current cap of about 1.1 million tons per year, to 1.5 million in the first four years—a 36% jump—and then up to 1.86 million tons in years five and six. That's a 78% increase over what most capacity projections use.

The County's estimate of a 12-year life for this expansion is based on lower volumes. If you increase the flow, the space fills faster. At these levels, the quarry and expansion combined could hit capacity sooner than if we just kept filling the quarry at the current intake cap.

The higher the disposal volume, the greater the real impact. Repeatedly in this process we have heard how the doubling the annual dumping in the last decade has affected the surrounding area. This is no longer a small facility on the hill. It's an industrial-scale operation. Expansion means more trucks, more noise, more odor, and a more visible trash mountain dominating northeast Benton County.

Second: Conditions of Approval Won't Be Enough to Protect the Public

The staff report contains many, many conditions, 25 numbered items, many of which contain multiple points. There are maybe 87 total specifications ...

The sheer number of conditions raises a red flag. If this project truly fit our community and our landscape, why make so many special rules to try to contain its impacts? Instead of considering whether the impacts on adjacent lands, public facilities, and the area's character invalidate the proposal, the staff report assumes the proposal's risks, uncertainties, and known consequences have simple fixes.

Would you hire a contractor if you had to make such an extensive list of prohibitions and requirements because of your fears of their work?

And let's be honest: once a project like this is approved and construction begins, it is very hard to stop it, even if things go wrong. In economics and management, there's a term called 'sunk costs.' It means that once you've invested time and money into something, you become very reluctant to abandon it.

The staff report recommends a deadline for meeting the preliminary conditions of four years, with a one-year extension possible. But what planning official would say "no" when the applicant says, "We've already spent millions, we just need more time." So the four year deadline bold-faced in the report is probably superfluous.

The staff report's recommendation about what happens if the conditions are not met is even more troubling, stating: "Failure to comply with the Operational Approval Conditions may result in revocation of the Conditional Use Permit."

"May result in revocation" means little in practice. The concept of "sunk costs indicates that once that permit is granted, the operation will never be stopped. That's human nature—and it's public administration reality.

And some of these conditions simply don't solve the bigger problems. A few rows of trees won't hide a landfill that's visible for miles—from Tampico Road, from Independence Highway, from E.E. Wilson. Nor will it restore the views of the Coast Range lost to this industrial presence.

Finally, enforcement is a major concern. Republic's poor record on methane emissions shows what happens when we rely on the company's self-monitoring. The County may require compliance with state and federal standards, but it also admits it lacks the capacity to independently monitor or enforce the impacts on groundwater, methane and other air pollutants, leachate, or PFAs. Even for this report, staff noted it lacked the capacity to review the groundwater data.

Depending on state and federal agencies for monitoring and enforcement is simply inadequate. The EPA is spiraling downwards, especially in enforcement. The DEQ publicly admits that it cannot fulfill all its responsibilities. The County does not even pretend to have such capacities.

This is not the right path for our community. I respectfully urge you to deny this application. Thank you.