September 2, 2022

NEW COUNTY WORKGROUP IS FRAUGHT

(Post by Ken Eklund to Coffin Butte Facts prior website; embedded links updated 8/10/24)

Because the last application to expand the landfill (LU-21-047) was so contentious, Benton County hired an independent third party to recommend something different. We were initially hopeful when Darren Nichols, director of the county's Community Development Department, acknowledged the high level of public distrust in the last expansion application process, then spoke effusively about LISTENING to the public to try and figure out how to do things better in the future.

A "situational assessment" was made, and the recommendation of that assessment was to assemble a "workgroup" to find a "constructive path forward regarding sustainable materials management and the future of solid waste disposal." Sounds promising, no?

Again, initially we were hopeful because, to reestablish trust, the stated intent was to *develop factual common understandings* to be used *as the foundation* for all other recommendations. Something that was sorely lacking before.

Sadly, the draft "common understandings" developed by County staff and sent to workgroup participants is selectively skewed in favor of the landfill, leaving out vast swaths of facts that show anything negative about it (see "**If you're still reading**," below). So from the get-go, trust is already eroding.

Meanwhile the whole process has also been rushed, because the County wants to make this happen before Republic Services reapplies to expand. Because once a new application has been made, this whole process becomes dead in the water. Once a land use application is filed, by law a set process takes over and the workgroup, being not part of that process, becomes completely irrelevant. Once a land use application is in play, public meeting law requires the Commissioners to only get input through public process, which means all the collective hundreds of person-hours by workgroup participants (as well as by the public committed to following the process) will have been for naught.

The facilitator sent an email to workgroup participants on Sept 1st detailing their scope and charge, indicating the end result will be to prepare a "Workgroup

Report" intended to provide the group's recommendations to the Commissioners. Surprise: the email included a convoluted 99-page "Draft Workgroup Report"(!) — you read that right, a report *pre-written* by the facilitator, pre-populated with skewed-to-favor-the-landfill information — and justified its pre-writing by saying that it will be 'iteratively updated' by the workgroup.

We are no longer hopeful about this process... unless the workgroup is able to turn things around. We can still be hopeful about that.

If you are interested, the workgroup meetings are public, so if you wish to follow the proceedings, here is the link: https://cd.bentoncountyor.gov/recycling-solid-waste/benton-county-talks-trash/ to the County website with details.

If you're still reading... here are some examples of the glaring imbalance in the draft workgroup report:

<> It includes a compilation of 114 Gazette Times articles — all preceding 1973… going back as early as 1910 (before women even had the right to vote!), not a single one critical of the landfill (see for yourself: https://cd.bentoncountyor.gov/documents/bctt-final-report-4-11-2023/). Yet it omits salient articles from a more relevant time period ('70s to present):

• Corvallis Gazette Times: 7/23/1976 "Wah Chang waste ignites, landfill operator cannot use water for fear of explosion"
• Corvallis Gazette Times: 5/25/1977 "Radioactive material found at Coffin Butte, Radium 222, as deadly as plutonium, concerns about groundwater contamination"
• Corvallis Gazette Times: 4/28/1979 "Dangerous acid dumped at landfill"
• Corvallis Gazette Times: 7/19/1979 "Commissioners require home developer to notify buyers of proximity of homes to dump"
• Corvallis Gazette Times: 9/24/1979 "Diesel soaked pot plants to be taken to landfill"
• Corvallis Gazette Times: 4/11/1996 "Local Landfill got OK to pump polluted water into Willamette"
• AP News: 8/10/2022 "Missing woman's body found in Oregon Landfill"

<> Other key omissions from the document:

TOTALLY MISSING: Description of the location, its geology, water resources, and natural habitats. What's the annual rainfall? Which watershed is it in? Where do locals get their water? Where does runoff go?

TOTALLY MISSING: Any history of people living here, from the Kalapuya onward. From this document, you wouldn't know that any humans ever lived in North Benton County, and Polk County is entirely forgotten. Definitely no "land acknowledgement" in this document! No mention of the Applegate Trail, Letitia Carson's homestead, the historic town of Tampico, or Bob Zybach's history of the Soap Creek Valley.

TOTALLY MISSING: Local economy and community. Adair Village is only mentioned as a former incinerator site. You wouldn't know there's a big K-12 school with a highly successful athletics program. What crops are farmed nearby? Isn't there some kind of Wildlife Area just across the road, and OSU's research forests and ranches? And BTW, why isn't Adair Village represented as a local government?

TOTALLY MISSING: Any mention of wildlife (other than rats and feral hogs). You'd never know that the county has colored in patches all around this landfill site as "conservation priority areas," in their Conservation Planning documents.

MISSING: History of corporate ownership. What exactly is VLI and how did it start? When did Allied Waste buy VLI? When did Republic swallow Allied Waste?

MISSING: Breakdown of legal responsibilities/liabilities of the different corporate entities. Which liabilities are VLI's rather than those of Republic? What liabilities would be retained by VLI if Republic decides to sell it?

MISSING: History of the growth of the "region" served by Coffin Butte. There should be graphs showing the growth in tonnage from different counties, over time.

ARBITRARY STATEMENTS: "No longer relevant" appears repeatedly in reference to conditions that VLI/Allied Waste/Republic have egregiously failed to meet. No longer relevant according to who?

ABSURD COMPARISONS: Were two small-population counties that approved mega-landfills in eastern Oregon really the only examples of "other jurisdictions" that staff could find? Let's see Lane County's criteria, or Yamhill County's, or Marion County's.