

## AS I SEE IT

# Do math on the landfill scheme

**I** know, I know – most people hate doing the math, but bear with me!

As readers know, Republic Services (our garbage people) propose to expand the Coffin Butte Landfill by burying a major county road, Coffin Butte Road, in garbage ... but under questioning by Benton County's planning commissioners, its rationale for the scheme has come apart.



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Background: Republic has three cells to fill: East Cell (currently filling) and West Cell (currently leased as quarry) north of the road, and a small South Cell. It claimed the East Cell has only four years left and it would take eight years to prepare the West Cell (quarry).

Under questioning, however, the quarry operator admitted it won't take eight years to prepare the quarry for landfill. It can begin accepting garbage on short notice, and in fact already has. The eight years is how much rock is left in the quarry. Republic would prefer to extract value twice, by depleting the quarry and filling it again with garbage, but that's all "eight years" is – their profit motive.

By questioning Republic, the commissioners ascertained Republic based its "years left"

figures on a yearly intake rate of 800,000 tons of garbage. So "four years left" in East Cell is volume for 3.2 million tons, "16 years left" for West Cell is 12.8 million tons, and South Cell adds about another 3 million tons: a total of 19 million tons of volume currently available.

And – this is important – these volumes are protected by an intake cap of 1.1 million tons per year. So, as things are, even if we hit max garbage flow, Benton/Linn have landfill for at least 17 years (filling 19 million tons at 1.1 million tons/year).

Republic's proposal, however, mandates the cap be removed. So although volume would increase – to 27M tons – the intake rate could increase even more. And likely would, due to the principle of induced demand.

And, you may be shocked to hear this, but already garbage from Benton/Linn accounts for only 25% of the landfill's intake (and falling). If intake reached 2 million tons a year or more – perfectly legal if the scheme goes through – then Benton and Linn counties would be squeezed out of landfill in 13.5 years or less.

The commissioners learned that never before has the county been unprotected by a cap: It'd be an unprecedented loss of local control over the landfill. Imagine our local garbage trucks coming to the dump to find trucks from all over Western Oregon and

even Washington State in line ahead of them. Because Republic's profit motive dictates they (1) get as much landfill capacity as they can and (2) fill it as fast as they can.

I get it – at first blush, capacity seems to equal security or lower prices. But if you do the math (and read the fine print), you learn that's not true here. Nineteen million tons of capacity didn't protect Albany from Republic's recent fee hike.

Meanwhile, back at the landfill, people are incensed. Commissioners listened for eight hours as businesspeople, drivers, truckers, cyclists, residents and more spoke about how closing Coffin Butte Road and enlarging the landfill 50% would worsen their lives and endanger our shared environment.

Most alarming to me: when commissioners asked how much more methane – a potent greenhouse gas – the scheme would create, Republic had no information. Let me do the math once more: If allowed, this scheme would be the worst climate crisis-causing event you will ever see locally. Wildfires are nothing compared to this.

Thanks for reading through to the end. Search the internet for more on Coffin Butte.

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