



Lane County to decide on facility that would divert food, recyclables from landfill

KLCC | By [Rebecca Hansen-White](#)
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Lane County Commissioners are poised to approve a contract for a new facility that officials say will divert 80,000 tons of waste away from the landfill each year.

Short Mountain Landfill – a sprawling site about five miles southeast of Eugene - houses generations of Lane County residents' garbage. Plastic sheets and layers of dirt cover most of the trash except one open corner, where workers and machinery tamp down food waste and everything else that shouldn't go in blue bins.

Dan Hurley, Lane County's public works director, said the landfill will eventually cover more than 200 acres. It was supposed to last for 140 years – but engineering changes to prevent collapse from earthquakes have reduced that number significantly.

"Right now, we estimate the landfill has about 70 years of life," Hurley said. "It's a finite resource, and this project would be able to extend the life of the landfill by 20 or more years. When we get to the end of that space, it is going to be very difficult to site another landfill. There has not been another landfill sited in Western Oregon since Short Mountain was sited in 1976."

Hurley is referring to the Integrated Materials and Energy Recovery Facility- or IMERF for short. If it's built, garbage in Lane County will first be processed there. Food waste and other organic material will be transformed into natural gas – which will reduce emissions and be a source of revenue.

Hurley said the facility will also greatly increase the county's recycling rate. In practice, that means recovering items from the trash that should have been recycled.

He said diverting food and recyclables from the landfill will – in the long run – save taxpayers money.

Impact on rates

Some local government officials are a bit skeptical. During a meeting in November, Springfield city leaders raised concerns about the facility's \$135 million price tag, a large portion of which will be paid for through increased garbage rates.

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“The cost uncertainty is a real issue,” said Springfield Mayor Sean VanGordon. “How does it impact ratepayers from the biggest business, all the way to the smallest retiree in Springfield.”

According to Lane County documents, tipping fees would increase by about 11%. That number could be impacted by inflation, or any tax credits or grants the county receives for the project.

The Springfield council also drafted a letter noting their concerns about how the diversion facility may impact timelines for two other multi-million dollar projects; rebuilding the Glenwood Transfer Station and a project that would move wastewater away from the landfill with a pipeline instead of trucks.

VanGordon said he’s not necessarily opposed to the new facility, but wishes local leaders had more time to understand how their constituents will be affected.

The county’s trash haulers have also raised concerns, including Eugene-based Apex Recycling and Disposal.

In an email to customers last week, the company accused the county of underestimating rate increases. They also argue that the environmental benefits are unclear.

“While a waste facility such as this may be needed at some point, we do not believe that right now is the time to do so before we take more prudent and cost effective measures to reduce waste through the collection systems that are currently in place,” the company wrote in the statement.

Apex’s owner did not respond to a request for comment from KLCC.

New strategies for waste

A local environmental advocacy group is on board with the proposal. Landfills cause groundwater contamination and leak methane, said Lisa Arkins, the Executive Director of Beyond Toxics. She said diverting food waste is a significant step in reducing harmful greenhouse gasses.

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we create,” Arkins said. “This facility will help us move to a new era of managing our waste, and doing it in a much more responsible way.”

Meanwhile, Hurley called Apex’s assessment of the project inaccurate.

“Unfortunately, there’s a lot of misinformation that’s being put out right now,” he said. “There are a lot of competing interests, and motives.”

He said most customers will see a roughly \$2.30 per month increase in their rates that will be phased in over four years. Hurley said natural gas and recycling revenue will cover some of the cost that would otherwise have been paid for by ratepayers.

The county is also looking for ways to reduce costs for those who can’t afford it, including grants and a discount system for non-profit, or school district garbage customers.

Commissioners will vote on the proposal during their Tuesday, Dec. 5 meeting at 1:30 p.m.

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