

June 26, 2018
E-Citizen@Consistency.Net

Mayor Denny Doyle,
Council President Lacey Beaty
Councilor Betty Bode
Councilor Mark Fagin
Councilor Cate Arnold
Councilor Marc San Soucie

Subject: Public Hearing on Appeals (APP 2018-0001, APP 2018-0002) of Director's Interpretation for OBRC Beverage Container Redemption Center (DI 2017-0003)

Mr. Mayor and members of the Council,

As a NAC Chair, Traffic Commissioner, citizen advisory committee member for both city-county TSP, CIP, and other projects, as well as a long-time volunteer in the Beaverton area, I was moved to provide some additional thoughts after hearing the testimony at City Council regarding the appeal of the Planning Director's decision about the siting of the OBRC facility.

The following are my opinions and mine only and do not represent the city of Beaverton, any board or commission I serve on, or any other organization, group or person. I would like to present three points for your consideration.

Redemption not Recycling

First, there is a difference between redemption and recycling, and it's a difference that is fairly intuitive: When you recycle, you put a mix of items into your curbside bin where it will be hauled off to a facility to be processed, with no further expectation. But when you collect items and return them to a location for the express purpose of getting cash back in return, that is an act of redeeming.

Opponents of the OBRC facility continue to ignore the director's observation that "processing" is something done when recycling. But one theme is clear, whether implicit or explicit by the testimony on both sides: When you drop things off at a recycling center, such as Far West Recycling (more on that below), you drop it off in order to avoid having materials like scrap iron and newspaper go directly into the landfill. That's "recycling," and you expect nothing more. Some of the people who gave testimony, such as the scout leader and the mother who lets her children carry a bag of cans, clearly noted that they are "redeeming" deposit identified bottles and cans. That is, they are returning items with the expectation of getting something back—in this case, money. People are not using OBRC in the same way that they used FWR.

A digression about Far West Recycling: In order to have meaningful dialogue, I believe people should understand the area and its history when arguing an appeal. When Councilor San Soucie asked if the appellants were familiar with FWR and the work it did in Beaverton, not only did they not know about recycling in the area, they had not even heard of FWR, which had been in Beaverton for 37 years. The people of Beaverton naturally understand the difference between a recycling center (FWR) and a redemption center (OBRC's BottleDrop) because we've had the opportunity to use both. For the appellant to insist that the OBRC facility is a recycling center akin to FWR shows a lack of understanding about our city's makeup. In addition, his insistence that recycling centers (which by his definition includes BottleDrop) should be sited in industrial zones where they would be welcomed and a better fit is simply false given that FWR did not want to close its facility but was forced to when the new property owner did not renew their lease in that particular industrial zone. For 37 years, FWR was such an important facility in our community that the Mayor himself engaged with them to try to find them a new home (<https://pamplinmedia.com/bvt/15-news/342763-222174-recyclers-need-to-relocate>). That the city of Beaverton was unable to find a suitable new location within the city demonstrates that the appellant should not be making a blanket statement that the applicant can simply move to an industrial zone.

Incorrect use of public safety

Second, the appellant and those opposing the OBRC facility have made arguments regarding public safety as a negative effect and direct cause of the OBRC site. Nearly every comment about personal safety and quality of life presented at this city council meeting is similar to those presented to Council only weeks prior about homelessness and overnight camping. These same comments have been used over and over for many local and citywide issues — even in our NAC, we heard the same concerns before regarding changes involving an unpopular grocery store chain, adult-themed shops, a new section of the Fanno Creek Trail, and, most recently, when a drive-thru fast-food restaurant announced it would be opening in our NAC. This indicates that the root cause of these concerns is not a particular business but instead a range of complex and ongoing citywide problems. In other words, when numerous citizens have the same reaction to completely different situations in different locations, we have to consider that these are not isolated concerns but a general theme the city needs to address; perceived correlation does not equate to direct causation. Hearing about issues of crime and safety are not new to those of us who are continually active in our community, but these issues have been becoming more numerous and visible. Social media, online forums such as Nextdoor.com, and news outlets reflect a general sense of “this didn't used to happen before in my neighborhood.” Problems the citizens and businesses of downtown Portland have faced for decades now seem to be spreading outward into our area, something the surge in overnight camping seems to confirm. Beaverton never had campers on the streets and homeless overflowing areas or our city, now we do. But homelessness, overnight camping, increased crime, and drug use need to be addressed at the city, county, or even state level rather than asking a single business to bear the burden of an array of complex problems. Everyone in our community needs to become part of the solution.

Equal input for a decision

Finally, I feel that you should consider how heavily to weigh testimony submitted by organizations or representatives of large groups if their conclusions were reached without all interested parties in attendance. At the City Council meeting, the City Attorney pointed out that anytime you let an appellant enter a statement, the applicant is not only allowed to speak again but must always be allowed the final word. So if OBRC was never invited to a meeting to present or explain their goals and purpose, how can a board make an informed decision about whether to endorse, oppose, or take a neutral stance on a matter such as this appeal? Only after hearing all of the parties involved can that board reach an informed decision or verdict.

For instance, when our NAC was approached to host a meeting on this very issue, we did so only after making sure all interested parties could attend, and we welcomed representatives from both the applicant and appellant. In the testimony submitted to Council, it is clear that another NAC did not follow that process. The other NAC only heard one side of this discussion, which is unfair to the participants in this appeal process. How can a NAC successfully facilitate meaningful, transparent, and accurate dialogue if they are known to make decisions hearing with incomplete information. The NACs job with regards to this process, is to educate the community about this land use processes, not undermine businesses as they seek to use that process. As a long-time NAC chair, I pride myself on making every effort to facilitate meetings that allow the presentation of the position of all parties so everyone can make an informed decision. As noted at the Council meeting, our NAC (Denney Whitford/Raleigh West), having hosted multiple meetings, facilitated discussions that heard from both parties in this issue, still did not take a position on this appeal. This is because during our discussion our longtime board members believed the system was working as it should; to take a position would be to undermine the efforts of both parties as they engage with the city on this issue.

In closing I realize reaching a decision about this or any city affair can be difficult, especially where there is a lot of information to review, and this case is no different. However, I gratefully appreciate your time and consideration of the points above as they apply to this case, because I stand by my belief that only by continually taking part in the process can we help to become part of the solution.

Sincerely,

Ernie Conway