



The Oregonian

Rumor raises Linnton's vigilance

Garbage - Fear of a transfer station in the area prompts defensive moves by residents

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SPENCER HEINZ
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Rumors have been flying for years about the future of the former Linnton Plywood mill site, and now another one takes wing:

Garbage-moving center.

Spurred partly by residents' concerns that the Metro regional government might be talking about turning the riverside mill site into a garbage-barging center, the Northwest Portland mixed-use neighborhood has formed a watchdog group and hired a land-use lawyer to guard its rights.

Metro officials say they know of no such center coming to Linnton.

Either way, the watchdog group -- Vision for Linnton -- is gearing up for whatever is to come.

Ed Sullivan, a Portland land-use attorney, has sent notices to the Portland Development Commission; Mayor Tom Potter's office; Gil Kelley, city planning director; and Jim Stahly, who is spearheading the worker-owned cooperative's efforts to sell the mill site.

"We are prepared to take the necessary legal action," Sullivan warned in his Sept. 17 letter to Stahly, to block any actions that would violate city law. In particular, the watchdog group points to a city ordinance (33.262) that, Sullivan says, requires officials to consider impacts on residential areas that sit next to industry in terms of noise, vibration, odor and more.

For a half-dozen years the Linnton Plywood Association mill site, just off U.S. 30's main stretch through the village, has been for sale and mentioned as the possible future home for anything from a biodiesel plant to battery recycling or breaking apart old ships. Biodiesel and garbage remain in the realm of possibilities that the community is concerned about, said Pat Wagner, a Linnton resident and member of the new watchdog group.

"We're a mixed-use community, and we're being treated like a heavy industrial area," Wagner said. "They forget that people live here."

Located a mile north of the St. Johns Bridge, Linnton Plywood Association opened in 1951 with about 180 charter shareholders. It was Portland's last plywood mill when it closed in 2001. The final 100 workers lost their jobs and the plant was reduced to a husk of ducts, bins and warehouse space with a log deck over the river.

The mill site's future, some residents say, will dictate the community's future.

Neighborhood anger and disappointment came to a head when, on Aug. 24, 2006, the City Council voted 3-2 to kill Linnton's dream of a new town center on grounds that existing industrial hazards were too risky for the envisioned residential development.

The neighborhood continued to hear talk about other industrial uses coming its way, Wagner says, and decided to establish the watchdog group to make sure the city follows its laws for protecting hillside residents and others from incoming industrial dangers.

"We feel every impact is actually magnified," Wagner said. "Every odor comes up right on the hill. Every sound."

Wagner, citing past conversations and unanswered questions, says Linnton has reason to fear that the region's garbage might end up coming through town.

On Tuesday, Metro officials said they had heard no mention of Linnton as a future garbage-center site.

Metro oversees two transfer stations for garbage and recyclables as part of its regional government mission. Chuck Geyer, principal solid waste planner and project manager for Metro's hiring of haulers, said the existing hauling contract will expire Dec. 1, 2009, so Metro has been drafting a request for proposals for companies seeking the next contract to haul garbage to Waste Management's Columbia Ridge landfill in Gilliam County. Geyer said it would be up to potential bidders -- not Metro -- to describe their hauling methods and pickup locations.

"Of the potential bidders that we've talked to," Geyer said, "none of them have mentioned using Linnton at all."

Spencer Heinz: 503-221-8072; spencerheinz@news.oregonian.com

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