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News Release

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Cowlitz County Commissioner Dennis Weber calls for ending talks with Republic Services over privatizing management of the Headquarters Landfill

“After extensive consultation with leaders of all five local cities, I am recommending that the County end further discussions with Republic Services over privatizing management of the Headquarters Landfill, we have also achieved consensus on specific management goals for county staff to address over the next several years,” Cowlitz County Commissioner Dennis Weber announced today.

“These goals will also meet the challenge made by local industry leaders to have the Board of County Commissioners pursue a more active role in managing this \$0.5 billion asset,” Weber explained. “One important annual goal will be to collect no more than 750,000 cubic yards of waste in order to ensure at least a 75-year life time for the landfill.”

“Current permits would allow for 1 million cubic yards a year,” he added, “but that rate would shorten the life time to 50 years which is unacceptable to the cities.” The solid waste management industry goal is to compact each ton of waste into a single cubic yard of space.

“One key element in our success will be to change the mix of waste collected at the landfill by increasing the more lucrative municipal solid waste (MSW) from Puget Sound communities currently shipping garbage east of the mountains and paying three times our local rates,” he went on to say. “We will need our staff to work with our private partner Waste Control to negotiate with other private haulers and municipalities to gain access to that revenue stream.”

According to Weber’s plan, this revenue would fund other important goals such as adequate qualified staffing, improved odor control, addressing congestion on Headquarters Road, improving watershed management of Silver Lake, and generating additional revenue for regional government services, including sharing some of the revenue with city partners. “We also need to harness the methane

produced by the landfill instead of flaring it off into the atmosphere,” Weber advocated. “But to make the economics work, we’ll need additional municipal solid waste.”

Public Works Director Mike Moss welcomed the challenge to meet Weber’s plan. “Give us a couple of years to meet these goals and I have confidence we can achieve them,” he said. He and Landfill Manager Ron Williams have already been recruiting qualified applicants to join their staff. They will begin working with private consultant Richard Thiel and other experts to create a detailed response to the management reforms as soon as the Board of Commissioners take formal action some time before Thanksgiving.

In addition to Moss’s response, the county will be working with the Solid Waste Advisory Committee to update the 2012 Solid Waste Management Plan and with the cities to revise the Solid Waste Inter-local Agreement to incorporate these management reforms. Local rates are not expected to increase by more than modest annual cost-of-living adjustment, although the impact of the passage of the Carbon Tax Initiative may force larger increases due to increased diesel costs. This initiative appears to be losing statewide, however.

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