

Testimony of Keith Steele, Board Chair
West Linn – Wilsonville School District Board of Directors
House Land Use Committee, SB 462
May 9, 2013

21415 Miles Drive
West Linn, Oregon

My name is Keith Steele and I am the Chair of the West Linn–Wilsonville School District Board of Directors. I offer this testimony on behalf of our Board in support of the proposed amendment to prohibit solid waste composting facilities from operating within 1,500 feet of a public school.

By way of background, the West Linn–Wilsonville School District encompasses 42 square miles with the City of West Linn at the north end of the district, the City of Wilsonville at the south end, a small area of Tualatin on the western edge, and a large area of unincorporated Clackamas County in between. We operate 15 schools and fastidiously serve roughly 8,700 children every day.

It is very unusual for a school district to testify before the House Land Use Committee. My appearance before you today is in response to a commercial solid waste composting facility that proposes to operate across the street from an existing primary school and middle school in our district. These two schools are located in unincorporated Clackamas County.

Exhibit "A" roughly depicts the locations of school facilities in relation to the proposed composting facility.

As evidenced in Exhibit "A", our nearly 1,100 students and 100 staff members can be required to attend school and work immediately adjacent to a commercial compost facility under current Oregon law. In addition, many thousands of children compete on the sports fields and courts at these facilities every year. The West Linn-Wilsonville School District has no legal authority in this matter, so ultimately we rely upon the State of Oregon to protect our children from the potential harmful effects of an operation such as this. The Board has petitioned the DEQ to carefully weigh the risks to these sensitive populations of kids as they consider the permit application, and today, we respectfully ask the members of this committee to consider placing limits on the proximity of such operations to public schools altogether.

Our district has invested significant sums of taxpayer money over the years in facilities and practices that keep our kids safe and that create an environment that is conducive to quality educational experiences. Even more paramount than our mission to educate our children is our fundamental responsibility to ensure that they are safe while they are in our custody. Naturally, we grow uneasy when our neighbors propose activities that could materially undermine our efforts to fulfill our legal and moral obligations to these children and their families.

Athey Creek Middle School in particular is a designated special needs school within our district, which means that it serves as a hub for educating students with a wide variety of needs and learning

disabilities, some of which could be exacerbated by high odor levels or excessive airborne particulates and bio-aerosols.

Subordinate to the health and safety of our kids and staff, but still of paramount concern are the legal and financial implications of a potentially DEQ-approved, but ultimately flawed composting operations plan. In the event that a hypothetical DEQ approved operation is shown to cause harm to students or staff, what shall be the district's recourse? Who will reimburse us should we be legally obligated or otherwise elect to install expensive HEPA filtration systems at both schools to mitigate the effects of the composting operation? Who will compensate us for the hundreds of lost staff hours navigating the intricacies of DEQ established complaint resolution protocols when parents pick up the phone in large numbers as citizens elsewhere have?

The potential implications of a composting operation such as this on our school district, or any school district in Oregon for that matter, are profound and worthy of thoughtful attention.

I conclude my remarks by underscoring that the Board of Directors of the West Linn-Wilsonville School District unanimously opposes siting a composting facility such as the one proposed in such close proximity to schools. We take no issue with the applicant in this case and believe that composting is a good and valuable practice, but the question of whether to allow such a large scale facility to operate in such close proximity to so many children is a statewide public policy issue that merits careful consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Steele". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "K" and "S".

Keith Steele
Chair, West Linn–Wilsonville School District Board of Directors

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EXHIBIT "A" – GENERAL SITE MAP

1. The red "X" near the center bottom of the map indicates the approximate location of proposed the composting operation.
2. The light green circle represents the area that lies within 1,500 feet of the composting operation.
3. 450 K-5 students are enrolled at Stafford Primary School, along with about 25 staff members.
4. Slightly over 600 students grades 6-8 are enrolled at Athey Creek Middle School, along with about 50 staff members.
5. The District Operations Center is the work location of approximately two dozen staff members.
6. As of April 16 2013, Athey Creek Middle School had 669 community sporting events scheduled on the tennis courts and soccer fields in the 12-13 school year alone. This does not include use of the soccer fields by the Willamette United Soccer Club, which leases these 3 fields to host hundreds of events annually.
7. As of April 16 2013, the Stafford primary play field had 210 community sporting events scheduled in the 12-13 school year.

