

SELECT A CITY ▾

SMALL BUSINESS RESOURCE GUIDE

Local, state and federal assistance for survival and recovery >

YOUR ACCOUNT

frontdesk@gardcommunic... ▾

INDUSTRIES & TOPICS



NEWS

LISTS & LEADS

PEOPLE & COMPANIES

EVENTS

LEADERSHIP TRUST

MORE...



FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF FRONTDESK@GARDCOMMUNICATIONS.COM

From the Portland Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/portland/news/2020/04/29/tmt-development-recycling-co-op-at-odds-after.html>

TMT Development, recycling co-op at odds after crowds mass at Portland BottleDrop

Apr 29, 2020, 2:29pm PDT

Property manager TMT Development threatened to evict the Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative from its North Portland BottleDrop location, arguing the cooperative failed to adequately disburse large crowds waiting to redeem bottles and cans. TMT said the large crowds violated Gov. Kate Brown's social distancing mandate.



JONATHAN BACH / PORTLAND BUSINESS JOURNAL

Cans and bottles sit outside a reporter's apartment on April 29, 2020. Drinking containers like these can be redeemed for a deposit.

The fight between the two escalated this week when TMT put a fence around a grassy area outside the Delta Park Redemption Center where customers used to gather as they waited to use the machines.

The Portland real estate firm also stepped up efforts to manage the crowd itself, instead of leaving it to the cooperative. There haven't been problems so far this week, according to Vanessa Sturgeon, TMT's chief executive.

"We certainly hope not to (evict)," Sturgeon said.

In normal times, customers can head to redemption stations at retail stores to return bottles and cans in exchange for 10 cents apiece, a deposit that buyers pay when they purchase drinks like soda and beer. But the new coronavirus led retailers to close their redemption centers, increasing pressure on standalone redemption centers such as the one at Delta Park.

The closures "put an unprecedented, although temporary, undue burden on our centers," OBRC Management wrote in a recent letter to TMT. "Quite simply, we are the last place for people to get their refund, and people are showing up to do that."

Sturgeon said there were at least 70 people tightly congregated when the location opened on Monday. OBRC pegged its estimate for the number of people there at any one time closer to 50.

Sturgeon said "dozens" of needles a day have been spotted in the grassy area. OBRC's community relations manager also said co-op officials have seen needles in the grassy area.

At this point, patrons are being queued on the sidewalk along North Hayden Meadows Drive, a move that OBRC raised concerns about because it's a busy street and requires more staff and more interactions.

The dust-up has reached the governor's office. Sturgeon said that in a March 30 phone conversation, Jeffrey Rhoades, an adviser to the governor, supported an idea for people to line up in a public space near the redemption. Rhoades could not immediately be reached for comment. A governor's spokesman was not immediately available.

The beverage recycling cooperative operates and owns BottleDrop, a public-facing can and bottle return service, according to the community relations manager, Joel Schoening.

On March 27, the property manager issued a letter informing the cooperative it was in default of the terms of its lease for 1176 N. Hayden Meadows Drive. The letter stated OBRC was violating a social distancing order issued by Gov. Kate Brown.

"Inability to implement social distancing guidelines for those customers who are waiting in line to transact business at the Bottle Drop renders Bottle Drop a business that must close unless it is able to implement social distancing guidelines," the default notice stated.

On April 3, OBRC sent a letter in response underlining its commitment to safety. Still, OBRC wrote, measures such as markers to help with social distancing, limiting the number of people inside its redemption centers and closing half of its machines to create distance between patrons "have severely restricted our ability to get people through the line and centers quickly."

In the letter, OBRC acknowledged the moves resulted in people trying to line up outside its redemption center.

"To be quite direct, we are imploring your leniency in the name of mercy and community spirit as we accommodate these members of our community who are in great need," OBRC wrote. "Please know we are willing to incur whatever costs are necessary. We continue to try to make the situation better every day, and implement additional safety measures as we continue to learn best practices."

OBRC said many of its customers are out of options, struggling and scared. "This center alone pays out nearly \$15,000 to this population every day, helping to meet basic needs," the April 3 letter stated. "We owe it to them to remain their lifeline while working with the state to do so safely."

Sturgeon said TMT received the email. She said she found it frustrating because TMT was trying to focus on resolving the problem, and it felt as though OBRC was more interested in causing a disagreement. She noted TMT has had few problems with the patrons themselves, while OBRC staff have shown "belligerent behavior."

Several security guards are now working the shopping center.

TMT's suggestions for how to handle this has been met with continued resistance, and OBRC has done nothing to remedy the issue, except for adding one security guard at the landlord's request, Sturgeon said.

OBRC has added two security guards — meaning there are three there now — and added staff at Delta Park in response to the store redemption center closures, according to Schoening.

TMT also has hired its own security guard to manage the line, in addition to guards who were already at the shopping center, according to Sturgeon.

"Since we have employed our security, there have been no issues," Sturgeon said.

On April 27, TMT placed a fence around the grassy area between a nearby Lowe's and the redemption center. The fenced area is not part of the property leased by OBRC. At issue are needles that have allegedly been spotted in the grassy area.

"These syringes and needles are particularly difficult to see in the soft surface of the grassy area, where children

regularly play, and are creating an added public safety issue for OBRC's patrons and patrons of nearby businesses," Sturgeon said in a statement. "TMT Development has fenced the area in an effort to keep people safe."

KOIN 6 News [earlier reported](#) on the fencing being put up.

OBRC has used the area for lines during peak summer months for the past six years with TMT's consent, according to Schoening.

"We've managed it well," Schoening said in an email. "There were no complaints. We clean it multiple times daily, and have a (safety) protocol in place when sharps are found."

Schoening challenged TMT to ask enforcement agencies to inspect OBRC's operations before threatening eviction or disrupting those operations, if safety is the landlord's priority.

"Closing off a space that has been effectively and safely managed for years, and instead forcing lines of people to a sidewalk across a busy traffic lane, makes the situation less safe, not more," Schoening said.

This week TMT limited the number of people who can wait in line at the Delta Park Redemption Center.

"The line may extend to the leased property limit," TMT's statement read. "People must queue in the designated sidewalk space, out of the way of traffic and other businesses, in order to redeem their cans and bottles and to abide by Gov. Brown's physical distancing order."

Anyone who waits in line beyond OBRC's leased space, or blocks the sidewalk or parking lot of other businesses, will get a warning, TMT said. Those who continue blocking spaces and traffic and can't remain far enough away from other customers will get a verbal warning, then a written warning.

After that, "they will be trespassed from the shopping center," Sturgeon told the Business Journal. "No written warnings have been issued to date. It has not been necessary."

Jonathan Bach

Staff Reporter

Portland Business Journal

