

CITY OF PALO ALTO
COLLEAGUES MEMORANDUM

Date: August 6, 2007

To: City Council Colleagues

From: Vice Mayor Klein and Council Members Barton and Drekmeier

Subject: Recommending the Council to Direct Staff to Study the Pros and Cons of Maintaining a Composting Facility in Palo Alto

We ask our colleagues to join us in directing staff to study the pros and cons of maintaining a composting facility in Palo Alto. Specifically, staff would be asked to:

- 1) Quantify the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions that would result from maintaining a composting facility in Palo Alto.
- 2) Compare the financial costs of composting in Palo Alto versus transporting green waste off-site.
- 3) Compare the pros and cons of in-vessel composting with windrow composting, with particular attention paid to land acreage needed and overall cost.
- 4) Explore potential locations for a composting facility, including somewhere on the current landfill site, other land in the vicinity of the Palo Alto Regional Water Quality Control Plant (RWQCP), the unused portion of the Palo Alto airport bordering Embarcadero Road, and the Los Altos Water Treatment Plant.
- 5) Analyze the impact on Byxbee Park of maintaining a composting facility near the RWQCP.

Background

The City of Palo Alto is developing a Zero Waste Operational Plan focusing on reducing solid waste. We also have made climate protection a City priority. We should try to make these two policies compatible whenever possible.

Palo Alto currently receives more than 17,000 tons of green waste per year at the City's 7.5 acre composting facility. Approximately 14,600 vehicles per year deliver this green waste. While transporting green waste offsite would continue to enable composting, it would add to our greenhouse gas emissions.

If Palo Alto closes its composting facility, the 14,600 vehicles delivering green waste would likely be directed to the Sunnyvale Materials Recovery and Transfer (SMaRT) Station where the waste would be consolidated and transported to the Z Best Composting Facility near Gilroy. In addition to generating greenhouse gases, the transportation of waste increases quantities of

other air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons and particulate matter.

Conclusion

We believe it is in the interest of both Palo Alto's Zero Waste Operational Plan and Climate Protection goal that we study the potential for maintaining a composting facility in Palo Alto. We hope our colleagues will join us in directing staff to provide the necessary information to help us make a well-informed decision.

This memorandum has been reviewed by City staff.