

January 23, 2007

TO: Jared Blumenfeld, Director
David Assmann, Deputy Director
Department of the Environment
Commission on the Environment

FROM: Nancy Wuerfel *NW*

RE: Planning for San Francisco's Future Landfill Needs

Mr. Assman has asked for my comments on the topic of a future landfill for the City and what the search process might include. San Francisco's Altamont landfill agreement will expire when we reach our capacity of 15 million tons. This could happen between 2012 - 2014, depending on the effectiveness of diversion efforts (discussed later). To manage the planning time to achieve the best outcomes for all the diverse players, I recommend the following actions be undertaken now.

PROPOSAL

The first step is to form a Landfill Task Force of City departments, including SFE, City Administrator, DPW, PUC, Planning, Health, and Mayor's Office, along with Norcal Waste Systems to define and study the issues related to future landfill needs. Each of these agencies plays an active role or has a stake in landfill issues both inside and outside City boundaries, and each should be part of the process of what happens "post-Altamont" to our solid waste. The Task Force should develop a set of scenarios optimizing the City's long-term solutions for all of its solid waste management needs.

Second step is to expand the Task Force to include other municipalities with similar goals and challenges as we have, as well as regional government agencies, regulatory agencies, and business agencies such as the Bay Area Council interested in solving public-private planning issues. There is a need for multiple landfills to accept different types of refuse or compost materials. The goal is to reach agreement on what plans are viable for San Francisco and, hopefully, for the entire Bay Area, in sharing responsibility for managing waste in compliance with multiple regulatory controls.

Third step is to develop a set of recommendations to influence San Francisco's long range planning, legislative action, and financial capital needs to implement the viable solutions developed through the first two planning steps for the future landfill requirements.

The Impound Account funded through charges to the City's refuse ratepayers has a budgeted item of \$200,000/year for five years, beginning in FY 2006-2007, to study and resolve this issue.

BACKGROUND

It has long been known that solid waste management is a regional issue. In 1975, an article appeared in the Water Air & Soil Pollution Journal stating: "Bay Area Council study of solid waste management in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area has concluded that there exists an appropriate *role for region-wide planning of resource recovery and multi-county solid waste management systems*. The Council recommendations divide regional solid waste management responsibilities between the private and public sector, and among different levels of government, from cities and counties to the federal level. The Bay Area and other of the nation's metropolitan areas are facing major decisions relative to solid waste management. Such decisions will require greatest consideration of the entire region's needs and resources which transcend local government boundaries." I believe these statements to be as relevant now as they were in 1975.

FUTURE NEED FOR LANDFILLS

Even with today's goal of achieving "zero waste," there will always be a need for a landfill to accept some level of waste described by the California Energy Commission as "an inescapable byproduct of human activity." The City of Palo Alto has our same goal and defines zero waste as "setting the goal of diversion from landfill to at least 90 percent of the waste generated by all sources both business and residential. There will still remain the necessity to landfill some materials for the protection of the community."

San Francisco needs to set realistic goals with achievable timelines for what zero waste means to us. The greatest waste diversion occurred in 2002 with 63,000 tons with diminishing amounts each year since down to 737 tons in 2006. Projecting 2007 waste diversion to jump up to 54,574 tons may be too optimistic.. Close monitoring of measuring the tonnage deposited to Altamont will be important to guiding the work of the Task Force (as of 2006 the cumulative was 11,373,678 tons). The more material we send to the landfill, the sooner our Altamont agreement is completed, accelerating the urgency of implementing the next plan.

The waste characterization study of August 2005 revealed that 37% of waste disposed through Norcal (191,000 tons) was neither recyclable nor compostable. This waste was primarily plastics and other materials such as textiles, composite products, etc. Since the recyclable and compostable materials can be redirected from the landfills, it behooves us to plan for the necessity of landfilling some of those other materials that are more difficult to divert while making efforts to reduce them.

OTHER TIMING ISSUES

PUC: San Francisco creates over 80,000 tons of biosolids each year that are transported to four landfill sites in the Bay Area. Four plans are being proposed now to address future wastewater management issues, which include the disposal of biosolids. A waste-to-energy option is being evaluated which will affect the volume and quality of biosolids requiring landfill. In addition, this option could include using commercial green waste collected by Norcal for energy fuel in PUC's facilities, thereby reducing the landfill requirements for this type of solid waste. The needs of the PUC must be part of the City's overall decision making regarding future landfill requirements.

NORCAL: The five year residential garbage rates will be expiring in 2011. Transportation costs and Landfill charges are a large part of the recovery of expenses Norcal will negotiate for. It is essential to have the City's landfill plans in place to allow both Norcal and the City to discuss the appropriate costs for waste collection, recycling and disposal.

CONCLUSION

San Francisco should take the lead on planning and discussing regional landfill issues, and what the long-term solutions will be for accommodating more population in the Bay Area while reducing the waste this density will inevitably produce. The time to start working on this problem is now.

Thank you for considering my proposal.

Cc: Mr. Ed Lee, City Administrator
Dr. Fred Abadi, Director, Dept. of Public Works
Ms. Susan Leal, Director, Public Utilities Commission
Mr. Wade Crowfoot, Mayor's Office