



Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury

2014-2015 Grand Jury Response Packet

Composting Organic Waste in Santa Cruz County

Time for a Regional Solution

Watsonville City Council

Due date: 90 Days (by Sept. 24, 2015)

When finished, email the completed response packet as a file attachment to:
grandjury@co.santa-cruz.ca.us

Findings

Finding 1: Compostable organic waste, which makes up approximately one third of municipal solid waste, must be diverted in order to extend the life of Santa Cruz County landfills and meet state mandates, specifically AB 1826.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE- explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

The organic waste stream in Watsonville accounts for about 35 percent of the non-diverted waste that currently ends up in the landfill every year. Currently the City of Watsonville diverts approximately 2112 tons of organic material from the waste stream annually. These materials are primarily yard waste, plant and other woody materials which are currently diverted and used to create a mix of mulches and other soil amendment products for use by the public. Additional programs are needed to achieve substantial additional diversion of the organic materials still in the waste stream.

Finding 2: Unless Santa Cruz County and the cities of Santa Cruz, Capitola, Scotts Valley and Watsonville invest politically and financially in large-scale organics recycling systems, they will be out of compliance with AB 1826 by the year 2020 or sooner.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE- explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"): Compliance with AB 1826 requires each jurisdiction to meet the mandates for

organics recycling producers of organic waste within phased in-time frames as follows: businesses who generate more than 8 cubic yards (cy) or more per week must source separate food scraps and yard trimmings and arrange for recycling services for that organic waste in a specified manner by April 1, 2016. By January 1, 2017, businesses generating 4 cy or more per week of organics are also subject to the diversion requirement. The bill also requires a business that generates 4 cy or more of commercial solid waste per week, on and after January 1, 2019, to arrange for organic waste recycling services and, if the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) makes a specified determination, would decrease that amount to 2 cubic yards, on or after January 1, 2020.

Each jurisdiction, on and after January 1, 2016, is required to implement an organics recycling program to divert organics from the businesses subject to this act. The law does not require jurisdictions to develop large-scale organics recycling systems but rather to meet the needs of the producers who need organics recycling services. The size of any jurisdiction's facility will depend upon the size of the organics waste stream and the economics specific to managing that waste stream.

Finding 3: Santa Cruz County and the cities of Capitola, Scotts Valley, and Watsonville all passed resolutions in 2005 recommending a regional composting facility, but as of 2015, no facility has been constructed, nor is there a completed plan to do so.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE - explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

The City of Watsonville has participated since 2007 in the long-range planning process for a regional composting solution. Participants in this discussion have included all of the cities in Santa Cruz County, as well as the Monterey Regional Waste Management District. More recently Santa Cruz County and the cities of Scotts Valley, Capitola, Watsonville and Santa Cruz have engaged in cooperative conversations and planning for a regional organics facility through the Integrated Waste Management Task Force (IWMTF).

In concept, collaborative resource recovery programs that should be mutually beneficial and more cost effective than if each agency were to develop its own facilities and programs. However, in recent years the IWMTF team has delved more deeply into the specifics of the organics waste stream for each jurisdiction, including the number of possible generators impacted by AB 1826, the potential tonnage of organic waste stream, waste stream and jurisdictional economics, land availability and permitting requirements. For some jurisdictions, participation in a regional facility may not make the most sense when the specific economic and waste stream factors are analyzed in-depth. Each jurisdiction in the County faces different challenges that will point to the most effective and efficient solutions that may or may not include one large regional.

Watsonville, like the other local participating jurisdictions, faces both positive and negative factors in the organic planning process. The City's relatively small waste stream makes it highly likely that the City will need to partner with another agency. The closure of the City's landfill within the next five years poses a challenge and an opportunity for the development of an arrangement for both solid waste and organics management by a partner agency.

The City's proximity to the Buena Vista Landfill and relative proximity to the Monterey Regional Waste Management District facility offers two highly promising opportunities for partnering with a larger agency. These options are currently being evaluated on a parallel process alongside the Local Task Force regional organics processing study.

Finding 5: Unless the Monterey Regional Waste Management District decides to expand its current organic composting facility, Santa Cruz County jurisdictions cannot rely on it as a long-term solution for their organic waste recycling needs.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE- explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

The City of Watsonville is actively exploring all available options for both solid waste and organics processing. Options include partnerships with a regional organics processing operation, with Monterey Regional Waste Management District and/or with the County of Santa Cruz Buena Vista Landfill. Given the City's relatively small waste and organics generation and the proximity to these large facilities with their potentially expanding organics processing operations, Watsonville stands to benefit from a carefully selected partnership or partnerships with its neighboring agencies. While Monterey Regional Waste Management District may or may not have capacity for the entire organic stream from Santa Cruz County, they may have capacity for the organic material generated in Watsonville.

Finding 6: Unless the cities of Watsonville and Scotts Valley develop organic waste recycling programs, neither city will be in compliance with AB 1826 by January 1, 2016.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE- explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE - explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

The City of Watsonville has 18 commercial solid waste customers that generate 8 or more cubic yards of material per week. These large commercial customers will fall under the 2016 organics diversion mandate. These large customers are generating mixed wood waste, green waste and small amount of solid waste. With the backing of the new mandate, the City is working directly with these customers to implement source separation of the wood and green waste from the non-recyclable garbage. The organic materials will be diverted to the City's existing green waste program. This program involves collection of wood and green waste at a designated storage area at the City's landfill. The incorporation of the organic material from the 18 large commercial customers into the existing wood and green waste diversion operation will ensure compliance with AB 1826 in 2016.

Finding 7: Rules about what can be put in the "green cart" are inconsistent and not well understood by the general public.

AGREE

PARTIALLY DISAGREE- explain disputed portion below

DISAGREE -explain below

Response explanation (required for responses other than "Agree"):

All carts used in the City of Watsonville's solid waste and recycling operation have custom, bilingual labels placed on the top and sides to inform our customers of proper use of each cart. In addition to information in English and Spanish, the labels provide the information in text and use of visual images. An effort is made to make the information accessible to youth and others with limited literacy abilities. In addition to the significant investment in cart labels, the City also has an extensive youth conservation education program that reaches about 3000 students each year with classroom presentations and field trips to the landfill, recycling center, wetlands, wastewater treatment and other water facilities.

Located in Ramsay Park, the City's Nature Center provides conservation outreach to 7000 visitors each year on topics including recycling, composting, litter and pollution prevention. Staff provides resources that support conservation behaviors at home and work. Nature Center staff also leads public tours of the local wetlands on the City's seven-mile trail system.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: In order to comply with AB 1826 mandates, the cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, and Watsonville should join with Santa Cruz County to form a regional agency to develop a large-scale organics recycling system located in Santa Cruz County.

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE

-indicate timeframe below

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED - explain below

Response summary, timeframe or explanation:

While a regional agency might offer certain efficiencies and economies of scale for an organics recycling system, considerations such as land availability, environmental justice, permitting requirements, available organics processing technology and local economics will likely dictate the approach any jurisdiction will use to meet AB 1826 mandates.

A joint agency is one approach that might be taken, but there are others that could also be implemented. For example, the various agencies might develop a "Memorandum of Understanding," or MOU, laying out the basis for cooperation without developing an entirely new agency. Another approach might be to bring in a private compost operator and for each agency to sign a separate contract with that operator.

The City of Watsonville is weighing a variety of factors in determining their approach to AB 1826. Staff from the County and local cities along with expert consultants will continue to evaluate these issues and develop recommendations for how best to proceed within six months.

Recommendation 2: The current pilot program for composting food waste from restaurants and other large institutions in Capitola and Santa Cruz County should be expanded to serve other businesses in the AB 1826 first and second tiers throughout Santa Cruz County, including Scotts Valley and Watsonville, until a regional facility can be developed.

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE- indicate timeframe below

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED - explain below

Response summary, timeframe or explanation:

The City of Watsonville is conducting an analysis all potential options. Participation in the County food waste program will be considered, however, there are significant regulatory issues that would need to be resolved in order to resume and expand organics processing at the Buena Vista Landfill. Of critical importance to the City will be the costs and environmental impact of partnerships with the County of Santa Cruz and/or Monterey Regional Waste Management District.

Recommendation 3: After selection of a composting contractor and technology by the Local Task Force, Santa Cruz County and the cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley and Watsonville should create a coordinated outreach program to inform businesses and the public about the benefits and requirements of the new organics recycling program.

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE - indicate timeframe below

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED - explain below

Response summary, timeframe or explanation:

The above recommendation assumes that composting will be the final technology selected for the diversion of organics materials from the waste stream. Other organics recycling methodologies exist and are still being considered by the Integrated Waste Management Task Force and the local jurisdictions.

In addition, the ongoing development of new State rules for composting operations, especially by the State Water Resources Control Board may delay or eliminate the use of composting as a feasible organics processing technology for many jurisdictions.

However, no matter what technology or method is ultimately decided upon for organics recycling, outreach and educational efforts will be extensive and an important component to the program's success.

Recommendation 4: Curbside "green carts" and bins should be clearly labeled to instruct residential and commercial customers specifying what materials are acceptable.

HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED

HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED BUT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FUTURE- indicate timeframe below

REQUIRES FURTHER ANALYSIS - explain scope and timeframe below (not to exceed six months)

WILL NOT BE IMPLEMENTED explain below

Response summary, timeframe or explanation:

Since the beginning of curbside recycling in 1991, garbage and recycling carts have had bilingual labels that provide instructions using text and visual images. When green waste collection was added, the same style of effective labels were placed on the lid of each cart. In addition, the Public Works and Utilities Customer Service phone lines are staffed by bilingual technicians during open hours who provide a wide range of information to callers. The City's website, www.cityofwatsonville.org also provides extensive instructions for use of the City's solid waste and recycling carts