

TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: CITY MANAGER

DEPARTMENT: PUBLIC WORKS

DATE: NOVEMBER 15, 2004

CMR:470:04

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR COUNCIL DIRECTION TO STAFF TO DEVELOP A PROPOSED ZERO WASTE POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that Council direct staff to return to Council with a proposed policy for zero waste, including an implementation plan.

BACKGROUND

Zero waste is a philosophy and a design principle that goes beyond recycling to take a far-reaching “systems approach” to the flow of resources and waste through society (Attachment A). Recycling is not sufficient to address the myriad of problems surrounding unsustainable growth in production, consumption, and waste creation. Zero waste, a component of sustainability, uses nature as its model. In basic terms, there is no waste in nature because everything is connected. Natural biologic systems cycle waste from one species to another as a food or resource. The zero waste philosophy is similar in that it encompasses the entire system and cycle of production and consumption, from raw material extraction to product design to how consumers choose products, and more. Zero waste policies and programs focus on reducing and minimizing the creation of waste, reducing consumption, maximizing recycling, and ensuring product design and packaging that includes take-back, reuse, repair or recycling to return resources to nature or the economic mainstream.

The California Integrated Waste Management Act (AB 939) established the 50 percent landfill diversion goal by the year 2000 for local governments based on an integrated waste management hierarchy that prioritized waste reduction and recycling over all other options. The Palo Alto community achieved 55 percent landfill diversion in 2002.

Most cities in California have met the AB 939 goal, and in 2001, the California Integrated Waste Management Board developed a broader strategic plan, which included zero waste. The first and seventh strategic goals of the Board’s plan are to: “Increase participation in resource conservation, integrated waste management, waste prevention, and product stewardship to reduce waste and create a sustainable infrastructure”, and “Promote a ‘zero waste California’ where the public, industry, and government strive to reduce, reuse, or recycle all municipal solid waste materials back into nature or the marketplace in a manner that protects human health and the environment and honors the principles of California’s Integrated Waste Management Act.”

Communities adopting specific zero waste goals and strategies date back to 1996. The adoption of policies and implementation of programs have led the following communities to pursue broader waste diversion goals:

- The Australian Capital Territory, in 1996, was the first government in the world to set a goal of achieving no waste going to landfill and has implemented the “No Waste by 2010” Waste Management Strategy.
- Over half of the communities in New Zealand have adopted zero waste as a goal.
- Seattle, Washington adopted zero waste as a guiding principle in 1998.
- In California, the following communities have adopted zero waste goals: Del Norte County, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo County, and Santa Cruz County.
- Other communities in California have adopted goals beyond 50 percent diversion, such as, Alameda County (75 percent) and the City of Los Angeles (75 percent).

The business community has shown leadership with best practices for eliminating waste, reusing and recycling discarded materials, and composting discarded organic materials. Some businesses have diverted over 90 percent of their wastes from landfills. The operations of these businesses range from factories to vineyards, to the high tech industry to carpet manufacturing.

DISCUSSION

Locally, zero waste is gaining momentum with the formation and action of the Zero Waste Task Force of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. The task force was formed as an ad hoc group to promote zero waste in the South Peninsula/San Jose/San Francisco Bay Area region. On September 3, 2004 this task force adopted a Zero Waste Communities Strategy. The task force’s zero waste communities strategy encourages communities to go beyond California’s AB939 goal of 50 percent waste diversion by adopting a zero waste goal and developing a tailored zero waste plan for their community. The intent of the task force is to:

- Network with other communities in the Bay Area, across the state, U.S. and throughout the world
- Raise public awareness on waste issues.
- Gain elected official support for policy and planning shifts needed to achieve zero waste.

A zero waste policy would be a fitting next step given the City’s Sustainability Policy: “To meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In adopting the sustainability policy, the City of Palo Alto accepted the responsibility, through its programs and services, to:

- Reduce resource use and pollution in a cost-effective manner, while striving to protect and enhance the quality of the air, water, land and other natural resources.
- Minimize human impacts on local and regional ecosystems.

The creation of a zero waste community would best be accomplished by obtaining direction from Council to proceed in the development of a zero waste policy (to be adopted by resolution) for the City. Staff believes the policy could be developed and brought to Council with an implementation plan within six months. The City Recycling Program has developed and implemented programs and conducted outreach using the integrated waste management hierarchy of source reduction, reuse, recycling, landfilling, and incineration. The City’s current waste reduction activities and 2003 Recycling Program Annual Report, which includes a history of programs was previously reported to Council (CMR 398:04). To assist staff in determining the type of programs to be developed, waste disposal characterizations are performed. A waste disposal characterization describes the waste stream that is currently being disposed. The most

recent study of Palo Alto's waste stream was conducted in 1997 to assist the City in achieving the AB939 mandate. Attached to this report are two tables comparing the results of the 1990 and 1997 waste characterizations (Attachment B). Since the 1997 characterization, the Recycling Program has developed, implemented, and expanded its program offerings to the community. Staff will need to conduct another waste disposal characterization in order to assess the current waste stream being disposed and to plan for future programs and outreach.

Throughout the process of developing a zero waste policy and implementation plan, staff will work with task force and community stakeholders, including local businesses to ensure that the proposed elements of the zero waste policy are viable options.

RESOURCE IMPACT

Resource impacts are not known at this time. Potential funds and staffing necessary to develop and implement zero waste programs and policies would be determined and identified in the preparation of a zero waste implementation plan.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

These recommendations are consistent with existing policies.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This recommendation to conceptually approve a zero waste goal is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and no further environmental review is necessary.

PREPARED BY:

MICHAEL D. JACKSON
Deputy Director of PW/Operations

DEPARTMENT HEAD:

GLENN S. ROBERTS
Director of Public Works

CITY MANAGER APPROVAL:

EMILY HARRISON
Assistant City Manager

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Grass Roots Recycling Network Zero Waste Briefing Kit (excerpts)
(<http://www.grrn.org/zerowaste/kit/briefing/index.html>)

1. Case Studies
2. Barriers to Achieving Zero Waste
3. Principles of Zero Waste
4. Frequently Asked Questions
5. Facts and Figures

Attachment B: Table 2-6 and Table 2-7 of Waste Generation Study, Prepared by EMCON, September 2, 1997