Mayor Shepherd and City Council Members

Attached is my letter supporting the Staff's recommendation re the Organics Facilities Plan.

Thanks for your attention.

Enid Pearson, Former PA Councilmember
April 19, 2014

Mayor Shepherd and Members of the Palo Alto City Council
Re: Staff Recommendation re Organics Facilities Plan

I support the staff’s recommended proposal for developing a Four-Component Organics Facilities Plan. I urge you to support it without further changes.

I have read the staff report and have several comments.

Your staff is to be commended for giving you a viable proposal to develop, fund and complete several very complicated projects. It will take at least ten years to see all projects to their completion. Many of you, including myself, one way or another, will be long gone from this scene. But you have a chance to at least start these projects without messing around.

The difference between what the voters of Palo Alto were lobbied on and what may truly be built is striking. Most of the greenhouse gas reductions will come from retiring the RWQTP’s incinerators and combining sewer sludge with food waste. This was already in the RWQTP’s long range plan before the E campaign was even started. I concede only that the time table may have been brought forward.

This report confirms that the dry anaerobic process touted by E was not feasible and had not been used anywhere in the world. And no where in the report is the one big selling point of E that all industrial buildings needed for the processes would be hidden by acres of a roof-top green garden implying no impact on park land. The report noted two vendors used no park land (very commendable) and the third very little.

Campaign pressure has been on you since 2007 and millions of dollars and thousands of hours have been spent by the city on studies, staff work, compost task forces and meetings. Thousands of pages of misinformation have been tossed around by the uninformed. You, and we, the public, now have something we can finally believe and accept. Don’t mess up this chance.

Your desire to please voters is expected, but we also want you to make decisions that honor and effect bigger and tougher goals. Support staff’s direction and you can reduce GHG’s while still protecting parks, open space and conservation lands – particularly our Baylands.

Please, move forward. Support your staff’s recommendations for a Four Component Organics Facilities Plan.

Enid Pearson, former Palo Alto Councilmember
1019 Forest Ct
Palo Alto, CA 94301
Dear Mayor Shepherd and Members of the Council:

We support the Staff’s recommended Four Point Organics Facilities Plan in the Baylands. It is technically the best plan for the City’s needs and the most financially superior plan to get results for greenhouse gas reduction for Palo Alto.

Sincerely, Robert H. Carlstead and Mary L. Carlstead
147 Walter Hays Drive
Palo Alto CA 94303-2924
Byxbee Park Composting

Mayor Shepherd and Councilmembers;

Next week you will be discussing the responses to the RPF sent out to seek suppliers who can comply with the composting required by Measure E. Based on the staff report it appears that no vendor or proposal provided an acceptable response. Six companies responded to the RFP. Three were disqualified and of the three remaining proposals, only one proposed to use any of the Measure E park land. None of the proposals saved any money for the city’s ratepayers.

Staff is recommending rejecting all of the proposals and instead is recommending that the City Council adopt a Four Component Organics Facilities Plan (OFP) for a City operated facility. The first three components are on the Regional Water Quality Control Plant site and the fourth component may potentially use a portion of the Measure E site.

Please reject the RFP proposals and adopt the Staff recommended Organics Facilities Plan without amendments because:

1. It provides the City and the Regional Water Quality Control Plant partners the best option for short-term resilience, long-term cost savings, energy production and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
2. The costs for the OFP are lower than any of the three RFP proposals available to the City.
3. Using a Thermal Hydrolysis process combined with Wet Anaerobic Digestion for the Sewage Sludge (Biosolids) and food scraps provides the greatest biogas yield, smallest physical footprint, and the highest quality biosolids residual.

Yours very truly,

Bob Moss
4010 Orme St.
Palo Alto 94306
I have been following your review of the staff recommendation, and request that you support the Four-component Organics Plan.

Thank you.

Elizabeth Weingarten
Dear Council members - I closely followed the evolving information and thinking regarding the compost/energy plant. I viewed the City Council's recent study session on the matter and read the staff report.

I strongly urge you to ratify staff's recommendations regarding the Organics Facilities Plan. The recommendations provide the path to the best possible outcome given the amassed research, information, proposals, analysis, financial projections, etc. That we can reduce GH gas emissions, deal with bio-solids more responsibly, and produce energy without destroying parkland set aside by Measure E is great news for everyone.

Winter Dellenbach
April 21, 2014
Mayor Shepherd and Members of the City Council:

At your meeting on April 29, 2014 you are being asked to consider the responses to the Request for Proposal (RFP) for organics management in Palo Alto. Concurrent with the RFP for organics, the City, at your direction, has also been working on a long range Biosolids Facilities Plan for the Sewage Plant. I support the Staff proposed Organics Management Plan, which merges information from both processes.

Four of the City’s Enterprise Funds affect and are affected by the decisions you will make -- the Refuse Fund, the Sewage Fund, the Electric Fund, and to a lesser extent the Gas Fund. Rates for those funds will be affected. And ratepayers in Palo Alto, as well as our partner entities in the Sewage Plant, will be affected.

As former Mayor Burt correctly recalled at your Study Session, when the RFP was issued, it was widely believed that there might be a magic technology out there which would process all three organic streams together, appearing to necessitate additional land near the Sewage Plant. Anaerobic Digestion had been touted as the panacea for all our organics. The City and the voters were told that we would 1) Save over $1 million per year, 2) Reduce greenhouse gases (GHG) by 20,000 tons per year, and 3) Produce enough energy to power 1400 homes.

The responses to the RFP have produced a different and more conventional result. None of the proposals uses a single process for all three organic streams. None of them saves over $1 million a year. Almost all of the GHG reduction is a result of retiring the incinerator at the Sewage Plant, which was already known at the outset of the process. On the plus side, the combined use of Thermal Hydrolysis and Wet Anaerobic Digestion on the Sewage Plant site will produce about 2.3 MW of electricity which is about 1.5% of the City’s usage.

Staff has had a very difficult task of combining the results of the two separate endeavors -- the long range Biosolids Facilities Plan and the RFP for organics. To their credit, they have come up with a proposed Organics Management Plan that merges information gained from the two processes and makes efficient use of City resources, including land.

As for land, I assert that the Harvest Power proposal, the only one that uses Measure E land, should have been disqualified. It did not comply with the RFP or Measure E by providing access on Embarcadero WAY, it did not fully enclose noisy and smelly yard trimming operations as required by Measure E, it utilized RWQCP land not allocated in the RFP and worst of all, it showed an administration building and commercial compost yard on dedicated Byxbee Park (not part of Measure E).

You will, no doubt, be told all sorts of things the VOTERS want, but the truth is that voters were told that Measure E was needed in order for the City to STUDY ways to better utilize our organics streams. They were told that surplus millions ($) saved by a new process could pay for park development. When signatures were gathered, the flier showed a “green roof” over the entire Measure E site. No one can know for sure exactly what the voters were voting for, because so many claims were made about what Measure E would do.

Now, you have the results of two separate studies and need to review those results with a full understanding of your fiduciary role in the Enterprise Funds as well as the technical recommendations coming from your professional staff. I urge you to approve the Staff recommended Organics Management Plan.
I urge you to accept the Staff recommended Organics Facility Plan.

Thank you.

Shauny Moore
666 Kellogg Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94301
Please reject the RFP proposals and adopt the Staff-recommended Organics Facilities Plan for Bixby Park unamended for the following reasons:

1. It provides the City and the Regional Water Quality Control Plant partners the best option for short-term resilience, long-term cost savings, energy production, and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

2. The costs for the OFP are lower than any of the three RFP proposals available to the City at this time.

3. Using a Thermal Hydrolysis process combined with Wet Anaerobic Digestion for the Sewage Sludge (Biosolids) and food scraps provides the greatest biogas yield, smallest physical footprint, and the highest quality biosolids residual.

Thank you for your attention to environmental quality and park preservation.
Caroline Garbarino, homeowner, 734 San Carlos Court, Palo Alto
Dear Mayor Shepherd and Members of the Council,

Please adopt the Four Components Organics Facilities Plan (OFP) as recommended by City Staff. It is notably the best option for short-term resilience, long-term cost savings, energy production and reduction in GHG emissions. The recommended technology will yield the highest biogas, the highest quality biosolids residual, and will require the smallest footprint in this sensitive location adjacent to Byxbee Park and the Bay.

As a long time defender of the Bay and our public parklands, I consider this latter benefit reason alone to endorse the Staff recommended plan, but clearly the other benefits of this option are also commendable.

Sincerely,

Lennie Roberts
Dear Council Members

Please Vote for the Organic Facilities Plan on April 29, 2014. Reject the three remaining RFP proposals as staff recommends. The 10 acre Measure E site should be returned to parkland. Thank you.

Jean Olmsted
We went to one of the study sessions and are writing to urge you to reject the Energy/Compost Request for Proposals and to support the staff report recommending the Organics Facility Plan (OFP) for a city operated facility for these reasons:

1. It provides the City and the Regional Water Quality Control Plant partners the best option for short-term resilience, long-term cost savings, energy production and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

2. The costs for the OFP are lower than any of the three RFP proposals available to the City at this time.

3. Using a Thermal Hydrolysis process combined with Wet Anaerobic Digestion for the Sewage Sludge (Biosolids) and food scraps provides the greatest biogas yield, smallest physical footprint, and the highest quality biosolids residual.

I especially appreciate the fact that you wouldn't be using the Measure E site for ordinary composting.

Thank you,

David and Jane Moss
347 Ferne Ave
Dear Council members,

Next Tuesday you will be considering proposals for an energy/compost facility at Byxbee Park. I have closely followed the proposals since before Measure E was placed on the ballot. I am pleased that City Staff is recommending you reject all the RFP proposals and, instead, recommends you adopt a Four Component Organics Facilities Plan.

I urge you to adopt the plan recommended by Staff. It seems to be a lower cost than any of the RFP proposals, it provides the greatest biogas yield, and it uses the smallest physical footprint. I do not think Measure E voters expected the property to be used for ordinary composting and it would not do so under the plan proposed by Staff.

Thank you for your consideration,
Anne Ercolani

Anne J. Ercolani
Telephone: 650.852.0620
To City Council Council  
April 22, 2014  
Mayor Shepherd and Members of the City Council:

To City Council Council  
April 23, 2014  
Mayor Shepherd and Members of the City Council:

I was a member of a citizen’s advisory group that met with City staff members (principally Matt Krupp) over the past several months to discuss City Staff proposals for managing the City’s three waste streams. The advisory group included both sides of the Measure E debate. I think it is fair to say that everyone in the group—regardless of Measure E credentials—was impressed with the fairness and objectivity of the process and was supportive of the thrust of recommendations in the Staff’s Organics Management Plan.

The Staff recognizes that the most urgent goal in the City’s organics management is to retire the incinerator and construct a Thermal Hydrolysis and Wet Anaerobic Digestion facility on the Sewage Plant site. The technology for such a facility is available and proven, and the facility would eliminate the majority of the GHG emission from Palo Alto’s waste stream while generating up to 1.5% of the City’s total electricity needs.

The Anaerobic Digester envisioned in the Plan allows for additional anaerobic digestion from pre-processed food. However, the Staff was mindful of the facts that pre-processing food waste involves a less proven technology, would require a major investment by the City, and the returns in GHG reduction and energy generation would be relatively modest compared with waste sludge digestion. The Plan wisely phases in the food-waste component only after the waste sludge operation has been established.

The last component for phase in under the Plan is aerobic composting. Here the decision is whether to carry out yard-trimmings composting off site, as is now done, or on existing park land (the Measure E site). I support the Staff’s decision to delay the decision on yard-trimmings composting for a number of reasons:

1. There is currently no practical method for extracting energy from composted yard trimmings. Therefore the only reduction in GHG emissions would come from reduced truck trips between Palo Alto and the current Smart Station composting center in Sunnyvale (currently about 2 truck trips per day).

2. Any small savings in GHG emissions would pale beside the GHG emissions from building materials, construction machinery, and energy for operations of an onsite composting facility, which contemplates a huge covered structure. In any case, the proponents of local composting have not addressed this issue, and until they do, the City should proceed slowly down this path, as the Plan recommends. This will ensure that the spirit of Measure E (to make Palo Alto a green city) is not undermined by a zeal for justifying undedication of park lands.

3. Nor have the proponents of local composting addressed the problems of noise or odor at the Measure E site that would result from a local yard composting operation. A walk in Byxbee Park will tell you that the constant hum of machinery is not conducive to enjoying the serenity of nature. Add to that the odor of the operation, and the visual blight of a covered composting facility, and you have a significantly degraded open-space experience. If that’s the way we want the priorities of Palo Alto to be remembered, at least let’s put off the composting decision until the local proponents of local composting can address these problems.

Sincerely, Peter J. Dehlinger, 58 Roosevelt Circle, Palo Alto
Honorable Members of the City Council

Some time ago I wondered what the carbon footprint of the anaerobic digestion (AD) electrical generation process might be, but could find no reference to it in the ARI or other publications. That seemed a strange omission because the analysis is not difficult; a high school chemistry student could do it.

So I did it. The result is that, per kiloWatt-hour or MegaWatt-hour or any other measure of saleable energy produced, the AD carbon footprint is double that of a coal-fired generator, which in turn is the universal benchmark of carbon-dirty energy. The attached graphics show how this comes about.

The analysis is based on data in the document by C. de La Beaujardiere cited in the graphics, so the data should be uncontroversial.

Some people call AD “renewable energy” because, presumably, vegetation picks that carbon out of the air and we can cycle it through the AD process again and again. However, to return that carbon to the air, we must build an expensive, spectacularly inefficient plant that produces a minute amount of our energy needs (the Measure E dreamboat would have delivered only 1% of Palo Alto’s demand). As the attached analysis shows, only 1/8 of the energy in that carbon could be called renewable; 7/8 is waste and overhead. Perpetual motion does not exist.

Nature has sequestered the carbon in the biomass feedstock from the CO2 in the air. Done. On the other hand, my trade publications describe heroic, expensive efforts to sequester the CO2 produced by commercial coal and gas-fueled electrical generators.

We, however, are urged to put that naturally-sequestered carbon back into the air, at great capital outlay, for a very small return, via an inefficient and very dirty process. That makes no sense to this engineer.

Isn't leaving that sequestered carbon sequestered the wisest, most effective, most progressive way to deal with global warming?

David Bubenik
Electrical Engineer
420 Homer Avenue
Palo Alto
City Council:
We are writing to ask you to reject the RFP proposals and to adopt the Staff recommended Organics Facilities Plan. This sounds like the best of several plans.
Lynn & Marilyn Hunwick, University South Neighborhood, 1110 Webster Street, Palo Alto 94301.
Councilmembers;

Speaking as an ex Palo Altan, thank God, I find the Staff’s Organic Facilities Plan much to be preferred over the option of a comprehensive anaerobic digestion plant. It appears to be as carbon efficient as the comprehensive approach, and at far lower cost and disturbance to its surroundings. It strikes me as one of those half-vast measures which work far better than a final solution.

Too bad it’s not likely to provide the “green points” or attention or rewards and environmental citations you hunger for. You’re just going to have to suck that up in favor of acting in the best interests of your constituents.

Respectfully,

Michael Goldeen
804 Lexington Avenue
Carson City, NV 89703

775-297-3688
michael@goldeen.com
Dear Council Members,

Please adopt the Staff recommended Organics Facilities Plan unamended for the following reasons:

1. It provides the City and the Regional Water Quality Control Plant partners the best option for short-term resilience, long-term cost savings, energy production and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions;

2. The costs for the OFP are lower than any of the three RFP proposals available to the City at this time; and

3. Using a Thermal Hydrolysis process combined with Wet Anaerobic Digestion for the Sewage Sludge (Biosolids) and food scraps provides the greatest biogas yield, smallest physical footprint, and the highest quality biosolids residual.

Please do not use the Measure E site (formerly the Byxbee Park habitat corridor) for ordinary composting.

Thank you.

Joe Hirsch
April 28, 2014

Via Email: city.council@cityofpaloalto.org

Honorable Nancy Shepherd, Mayor
Honorable Liz Kniss, Vice Mayor
Honorable City Council Members
City of Palo Alto
250 Hamilton Avenue
Palo Alto CA 94301

Re: “Direct Staff to Pursue the Four-Component Organics Facilities Plan” [Summary Title] (ID # 4550)

The Recommendations of the City Staff Should Not Be Adopted

Dear Mayor Shepherd, Vice Mayor Kniss, and City Council Members,

Introduction

Nearly two and a half years ago, over 64% of Palo Alto voters approved Measure E. On March 4, 2013, City Staff issued an energy/compost facility RFP (“E/CF RFP”). Now, based in part upon a 200+ page document issued only recently, City Staff recommend, among other things, jettisoning the existing RFP process and embarking on a new “Organics Facilities Plan (OFP…), by hiring a Program Management firm…..” Choosing this course of action would be unwise. The new OFP:

- remains at a conceptual stage and may incorporate unreasonable financial assumptions;


• delays construction of an anaerobic digester for many years; and
• raises questions about how food and yard waste will actually be treated.

I respectfully urge you not to accept City Staff’s recommendations. Details of the proposed new OFP should be fleshed out, vendors that have submitted responses to the E/CF RFP should be permitted to submit additional information, and the public should have further opportunity to respond to the OFP.

The OFP Should Be Fleshed Out Before Further Action Is Taken

The Executive Summary to the Staff Report shows that the OFP remains at a conceptual stage and is linked to another draft plan.

Rather than select any of the proposals submitted in response to the E/CF RFP, staff instead recommends that the City of Palo Alto pursue an OFP, which staff has developed in concept based on the review of proposals submitted in response to the E/CF RFP and the draft Biosolids Facilities Plan (BFP). (www.cityofpaloalto.org/energycompost)

(Staff Report, p. 2 (emphasis added and hyperlinks deleted).)

The OFP is claimed to be economically advantageous (see, e.g., Staff Report, p. 3), but crucial details are not apparent. The Staff Report asserts that “[t]he OFP provides the lowest overall net present value (NPV) over the 20-year time horizon ($76.8 million NPV),” id. at p. 15. But is this a fair, apples-to-apples comparison?

Two aspects of the Staff Report’s financial comparison raise especially important issues: projected staffing levels incorporated in the OFP and the apparent exclusion of further, collaborative responses from vendors.

The report asserts that “[t]here will be no net change in total personnel to operate the system…..” (Staff Report, Attachment C, response to question 16, p. 49.) Because headcount will be a crucial variable, this assertion should be tested carefully. Does it apply to all components of the OFP, or merely to Component Two (since it is made in response to a question regarding Component Two)? The report tries to support this assertion by stating that “[t]he new dewatering and AD systems will be highly automated…), ibid., but have appropriate costs been included for the ongoing hardware, software, and consulting expenses that will likely be associated with such automation? Perhaps most importantly, what do the vendors have to say about headcount? Are their staffing models comparable to what the Staff Report assumes?

In addition, it would be extremely helpful to know whether the vendors that have already submitted responses to the E/CF RFP would care to refine their responses in light of City Staff’s new proposed plan. The Staff Report indicates that at least two vendors have more to say.

While two of the bidders have subsequently offered to combine and modify their proposals in an attempt to match staff’s improved OFP proposal, this combined proposal would not comply with the existing RFP which requested a third party operated facility. (Staff Report, p. 4.) Whether or not these bidders might submit “subsequent proposals and bids,” ibid., they should be allowed not only to comment upon the assumptions in the OFP, but also to sharpen their pencils. Allowing for refined, collaborative responses from current vendors should provide a much more reasonable basis for judging the economic merits of the OFP.

5 Three general sets of questions might be asked. First, does the report present sufficient information to allow one to understand the detailed assumptions used to calculate the $76.8 million NPV figure? Secondly, are those assumptions fair in comparison with the detailed assumptions used by the vendors that responded to the E/CF RFP? Thirdly, would the OFP provide the same level of benefits as the proposals offered by those vendors?
Construction of An Anaerobic Digester Should Not Be Delayed

If the OFP were adopted, when would the anaerobic digester finally be built? The OFP’s phased approach could postpone construction of the anaerobic digester far into the future. The report’s projected timeline puts “Completion of Component Two” off until “2020-2022.” If vendors will make firm, enforceable commitments to complete construction of an anaerobic digester at a measurably earlier date, then, as a matter of policy, those commitments should count as significant advantages over the OFP.

Does the OFP Guarantee Appropriate Treatment of Food and Yard Waste?

While waiting until 2020-2022 or beyond to build the anaerobic digester is worrisome, the OFP’s lack of firm commitments to treat Palo Alto’s food and yard waste responsibly is even more problematic. As to food scarps, “staff’s cost estimates for Component Three are preliminary…..” (Staff Report, p. 11.) This does not give one confidence that food waste will definitely become a feedstock for the anaerobic digester. Will anything be done to treat yard trimmings responsibly?

Staff will continue to follow these emerging technology developments and improvements in composting technology to evaluate whether a local facility on the 3.8-acre relatively flat portion of the Measure E site is a sustainable option.

_Id._ at p. 12. This is no commitment at all. Even in its present, conceptual form, the OFP gives one little confidence that Palo Alto will treat food and yard waste responsibly at any definite time in the future.

Conclusion

The Staff Report is scheduled to be considered on April 29th, a week after Earth Day 2014, and less than a month after a new report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirmed that “the effects of climate change are already occurring on all continents and across the oceans.”6 Our community has long prided itself on its environmental leadership, but we have not yet reached the goals to which we aspire regarding our multiple streams of organic waste.

After years of unfortunate delays, we are poised to move forward. We can build an anaerobic digester and adopt other measures to deal with our sewage sludge, our food scraps, and our yard waste responsibly.

After so much time, it would be even more unfortunate were we to settle for half measures. We should not settle for an approach that has not been carefully vetted, that may rest upon ill-considered or unwarranted assumptions, that could delay construction of the anaerobic digester.

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digester unnecessarily, or that fails to guarantee responsible treatment of our food and yard
waste.

I respectfully urge you not to accept City Staff’s recommendations. Details of the OFP,
especially its financial underpinnings, should be made clear. Vendors should be permitted to
submit additional information. The public should have a reasonable opportunity to analyze and
comment upon the OFP before further action is taken.

Respectfully submitted,

John Kelley