

From: [Bob Wenzlau](#)
To: [Council, City](#)
Subject: Supporting Consent Item Dec 12 - GreenWaste Contract Amendment
Date: Sunday, December 11, 2022 9:07:41 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Be cautious of opening attachments and clicking on links.

Council Members,

I support the contract amendment with GreenWaste that directs plastic and mixed paper to US domestic markets away from Asia. The City Staff's efforts along with the cooperation of GreenWaste has been complex and pioneering.

However, we have not crossed the finish line on this core challenge for managing our solid wastes.

First, we can only now hypothesize that the fate of our corrugated cardboard is acceptable. This is 42% of our waste materials, and will continue to be shipped to Asia. We theorize that corrugated cardboard is less contaminated, and would presumably be handled consistent with US standards, but we have no idea. In general 25% of the incoming material for recycling are disposed of either as solids or liquids - each a waste, and the fate of those materials is unknown. Do these residuals go to an open dump, and is the industrial wastewater receiving treatment prior to discharge to waterways?

Second, our actions to direct our mixed paper and plastics are a proxy arrangement. GreenWaste is pulling the same tons of mixed paper and plastic that Palo Alto generates, and shipping those to domestic markets. Our waste is 10% of the incoming waste, and is mixed through the processing facility with the other 90% that comes from San Jose and other adjoining cities. As such, actually only 10% of Palo Alto's waste is directed away from Asia, while the other 90% still goes to Asia. For the resident that wants to feel that the materials they put in their blue bin are actually not going to Asia, this arrangement still falls short, as in fact 90% of those materials still will find their way there.

Even with the deficiencies noted in the current arrangement, the amendment to the contract is still correct and shows our City's leadership on this failure in California's waste management. The deficiencies build our agenda.

Corrugated cardboard might properly be managed in Asia if we had knowledge of the paper processing facilities in Asia. It is a given that the brokerage system will always hide the destined Asian paper processing facility. However, if we can determine that large scale cardboard processing, regardless of the Asian country, is done in an acceptable manner, then we could have comfort that we are doing no social or environmental harm through these shipments. (I hold doubts about the efficacy of tracing wastes which has been another approach offered.)

As I represented Palo Alto in the Philippines via Neighbors Abroad, I had the opportunity to interview government officials, and became reasonably comfortable with the environmental enforcement regime for industrial facilities. But corrugated paper does not go to the Philippines. Yet the conversation revealed that **one could interview environmental officials, directly or via a consultant, and gain insights across the countries that the corrugated**

would be destined for. Another **potential ally in this discussion could be Amazon, as their supply chain would likely hold insights as to the environmental standards** as they build up their paper products from pulp sourced where our cardboard is destined.

Additionally, it is critical that we **bring the other communities using the GreenWaste facility on board with Palo Alto's determination.** When San Jose directs GreenWaste to stop the shipment of their plastics and mixed paper to Asia, then and only then, could a Palo Alto placing their plastics and paper in the blue bin know that the materials they see in their bin are headed toward environmentally sound domestic markets.

Personally, I am humbled to have been part of this process. Since 2018, we have lifted this topic internationally, through original coverage by the Weekly, that was later picked up by the Guardian and other media, and more recently by NBC. Like our work on climate, **this is an honorable moment where the light of Palo Alto shines across the world.** We should be proud when we can use modest municipal resources to lead on critical topics.

Sincerely,

Bob Wenzlau

Note:

- 1) The percentages shared in my correspondence are based upon my best estimates, and likely need some adjustment. However they provide an adequate basis for the arguments made.
- 2) This topic has a significant impact on Palo Alto's climate footprint. However the ICLEI methodology the City applies to calculate carbon footprint does not assimilate climate impact once our waste is loaded for shipment - the wastes and potential impact should show in our baseline. As such the climate ramifications of this improvement for mixed paper are undervalued.

--

Bob Wenzlau
bob@wenzlau.net
650-248-4467