



# CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

## COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

**AGENDA DATE:** September 30, 2008

**TO:** Mayor and Councilmembers

**FROM:** Environmental Services Division, Finance Department

**SUBJECT:** Status Report – Solid Waste Action Plan And Single-Use Bags

**RECOMMENDATION:** That Council:

- A. Receive a report on the status of several key projects of the City of Santa Barbara's Solid Waste Action Plan; and
- B. Receive the recommendations of the City Council Solid Waste Committee regarding the reduction of single-use bags.

### **BACKGROUND:**

In September 2005, City Council approved the Solid Waste Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan), which contains a number of programs and projects designed to maximize the diversion of municipal solid waste (MSW) from landfill disposal. The Strategic Plan's overarching goals are to divert 70% of all MSW from landfills by the year 2010 and to become the Recycling Leader of the State of California. The City has received a letter from California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB) confirming a 67% diversion rate for calendar year 2006.

In March 2008, City Council approved a Solid Waste Action Plan (Action Plan), to focus and better coordinate staff efforts to implement the projects of the 2005 Strategic Plan. The Action Plan spells out an approach to maximizing diversion from landfill disposal for fiscal years 2008 through 2011. The Action Plan's top two priorities are Business Sector Recycling and the implementation of a Foodscrap Recovery and Composting Program in the Business Sector.

On August 26, 2008 staff presented an overview of single-use (plastic and paper) bags to the Solid Waste Committee. Staff provided a recommended approach to moving the community toward reusable bags, and away from single-use bags. The Committee recommended bringing this item to City Council in conjunction with this Action Plan update.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The Action Plan was designed to refocus and refine staff efforts implementing the various programs and projects contained in the 2005 Strategic Plan. The Action Plan has improved project management and tracking. Additional staffing resources, coupled with better coordination and timing of key projects, has produced measurable results for a number of projects and programs. Following is a summary of the status of the key recycling and related diversion efforts over the past six months.

### Business Sector Recycling

In April 2008, a rate study was initiated to increase the financial incentives available to the business sector to recycle more and dispose of less. Staff is working closely with the project consultant to ensure that the proposed rate structure achieves revenue neutrality, as required by the City's franchise agreements with Allied Waste Industries and MarBorg Industries. Between now and Spring 2009, staff is planning several presentations and forums with the business community, including the Downtown Organization, the Chamber of Commerce and the Santa Barbara Restaurant and Lodging Association.

As the result of a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process, a professional consulting firm was identified to provide an Outreach and Technical Assistance Plan for Business Recycling. This project is aimed at fine-tuning the efforts of recycling staff and, ultimately, maximizing the impact that this program has on the City's diversion rate. Staff is currently providing the majority of technical assistance to large malls (e.g., Paseo Nuevo, La Cumbre), big box stores (e.g., Office Max, Staples), hotels and banks. In the first three months of having two full-time recycling coordinators, over 151 total business contacts were made, with 115 of those businesses increasing their recycling capacity.

### Foodscraps Recovery and Composting

Since April 2007, the City's pilot Foods Scrap Recovery and Composting Program has diverted over 420,000 pounds, or 210 tons, of foods scraps from landfill disposal. This has resulted in a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG's), representing approximately 125 Toyota Priuses being removed from the road when measured in CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents (CO<sub>2</sub>e). Participants in the pilot program include Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital, Santa Barbara City College, the Santa Barbara Zoo, The Berry Man food distributor, Harding and Peabody elementary schools, as well as several restaurants and coffee shops.

Our current efforts are now directed at implementing a full-scale program available to all food serving establishments, including restaurants, coffee shops, school cafeterias, food distributors, etc. Prior to and after implementation, staff's efforts will be focused on larger businesses to provide technical assistance and training to ensure an orderly and effective transition. Some of the elements of the program currently being worked on by

staff include selecting a drop-off location for the material, determining how to transport the material to a commercial composting facility, securing a contract for composting services, developing new rates in tandem with the business recycling rates.

Over the long-term, we anticipate expanding the Foodscrap Recovery and Composting Program to the single-family and multi-unit residential sectors. This will require working with County staff to devise an approach that effectively deals with the financial impact of removing the City's greenwaste from the County mulching operation. This issue must be addressed since rolling the program out to the multi-unit and single-family residential sectors will require foodscrap to be placed in the existing greenwaste containers.

#### Electronic Waste (E-Waste) Collection Events

Over the past year, the City's Environmental Services Division has hosted four E-waste collection events at various sites throughout the City. In total, the first three events resulted in approximately 190,000 pounds of E-waste being diverted and successfully recycled. The most recent event, which took place on August 8th and 9th at the Sears parking lot on upper State Street, produced over 185,000 pounds of E-waste, nearly the amount that was collected in the first three events combined! These events have been a great success. They have also proven that there is a great deal of interest and demand for residents and businesses to safely dispose of unwanted electronics.

MarBorg Industries recently informed staff that they will begin accepting all E-waste at the City ABOP (Antifreeze, Batteries, Oil and Paint) Center, located at the intersection of Nopalitos Way and Cacique Street, by the end of calendar year 2008. As part of the Action Plan, staff is researching additional service options that will make E-waste disposal and recycling even more convenient for the community. One of the options under consideration is providing E-waste collection at the curb to residential customers on a quarterly basis.

#### New Utility Billing System

On September 8, 2008 the City's new utility billing system, CIS-Infinity, went live. Staff, from several departments, has been working hard to ensure that customers are being billed correctly and that all inventory (cans, carts and bins) are being properly transferred from the City's old billing system (FMS) to CIS-Infinity. As requested by the Solid Waste Committee, staff is working on some final modifications to the new system so that it will include container information on bills, allowing customers to self-audit their trash and recycling collection services. This container information, along with a graphic that depicts the percentage of services that are dedicated to diversion, is anticipated to be printed on bills in January 2009.

### Single-Use Plastic and Paper Bags

The environmental effects of plastic bags have been discussed by the City Council, the Solid Waste Committee, and staff on several occasions over the past two years. In May 2007, staff brought an agenda report to City Council to get Council's direction on Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) and single-use plastic bags. Council directed staff to meet with the Solid Waste Committee to discuss moving forward with an EPS ban and to discuss the possibility of a future ban on plastic grocery bags.

With regard to EPS, staff concluded that a ban was premature until a citywide organics collection and composting program was implemented, which would allow the City to ban EPS and additionally require the use of containers made of compostable materials. In March 2008, the City Council approved the proposed Solid Waste Action Plan, which included staff's proposed postponement of any action to ban EPS until the City implemented a citywide organics collection and composting program, which is scheduled to be implemented over the next three years.

With regard to plastic bags, staff did some research as to what other jurisdictions were doing, and outreached to local businesses in terms of the impacts that a ban would have on them and to receive their input. The results of these efforts were presented to the Solid Waste Committee in July 2007. However, shortly thereafter, staff re-evaluated moving forward with some type of ban on plastic bags in the context of other diversion priorities. While plastic bags are clearly detrimental to the marine environment and need to be dealt with, the Solid Waste Committee approved postponing this effort temporarily so that staff could focus its efforts and resources on programs and initiatives that have a significant impact on solid waste diversion from landfills, which is the Division's primary mission.

In addition to the workload impacts on City staff and the effects on existing priorities, there are a number of complexities associated with plastic bags that would need to be addressed, including: 1) the environmental impacts of *paper* bags and, therefore, the need to develop a strategy that doesn't result in an increase in the use of paper bags, but rather reduces the use of both plastic and paper bags in favor of reusable bags; 2) existing legislation prohibiting local governments from imposing fees on single-use plastic bags; and 3) the potential legal challenges and impracticality of an outright ban on plastic and/or paper bags.

However, staff has recently met with members of the community, including representatives from Santa Barbara Channel Keepers, to consider an approach that may potentially enable the City to move forward sooner rather than later with measures to reduce the distribution of both plastic and paper bags. It also utilizes community resources and, thus, minimizes the workload impacts to City staff.

The proposed strategy, which is still being developed in more detail, includes the following key elements:

1. Outreach to the stakeholders and community to advise them of the City's goals, and to hear their concerns and feedback of a proposal to reduce the distribution of single-use bags (plastic and paper);
2. Implementing an ordinance this fiscal year, which would be become effective 12-18 months later, aimed at reducing single-use plastic and paper bags;
3. Developing an educational campaign to inform the community of the environmental impacts associated with plastic and paper bags, and the benefits of using reusable bags;

On August 26, 2008, the Solid Waste Committee received a presentation from staff on the proposed approach and timing outlined above, and received input from members of the community interested in banning single-use bags. The Committee supported this proposed strategy, and recommended forwarding this strategy to the City Council.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:**

Recycling municipal solid waste and the City's related efforts to divert material from landfill disposal have considerable beneficial impacts to the environment. The US EPA has acknowledged and developed metrics that provide clear evidence of reduced greenhouse gas emissions through recycling and composting, which result in the creation of products using recycled feedstocks versus using virgin, natural resources. All of the activities of the Action Plan contribute to the City's goal of becoming a more sustainable community.

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**APPROVED BY:** City Administrator's Office