



## **County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors**

### **Agenda Item Submittal**

**From:** Community Development and Infrastructure

**Subject:** Recycling and Solid Waste Planning Progress Report

**Meeting Date:** January 14, 2025

**Formal Title:** Consider report on Recycling and Solid Waste long-term planning progress, and take related actions

### **Recommended Actions**

1. Accept and file Recycling and Solid Waste long-term planning progress report and recommendations on zero waste planning; and
2. Direct the Department of Community Development and Infrastructure to return on or before December 16, 2025, with a Recycling and Solid Waste long-term planning progress report.

### **Executive Summary**

A strategic plan is necessary to ensure that Recycling and Solid Waste Services has funding to maintain current operations, to comply with State mandates, and for capital improvements to prepare for the closure of the Buena Vista Landfill. In this report, we address our efforts in the following areas of our operations:

- Buena Vista Landfill Facilities Planning
- Ben Lomond Transfer Station Facilities Planning
- Assessments and Charges - CSA 9C and Infrastructure and Closure Charge
- Illegal Dumping, Litter Abatement, and Trash Talkers
- Disaster Debris Management
- Climate Change and Organic Waste Management (Senate Bill 1383)
- Edible Food Recovery Countywide Collaboration
- Green Business and Green Schools Program
- Zero Waste Update

### **Discussion**

On May 23, 2017, the Board approved a new 10-year franchise contract with GreenWaste Recovery, Inc., which included provisions to improve fiscal stability and make progress toward the County's Zero Waste goals. These goals include:

- Encouraging residents and businesses to implement zero waste programs,
- Developing public and private reuse infrastructure in the community,
- Leading by example to reduce County waste, and
- Developing a zero waste operations plan that includes metrics to assess progress toward achieving the County's Zero Waste goals

Since May 2017 Recycling and Solid Waste has made regular reports to implement the County's Zero Waste goals and the State waste management mandates. This report summarizes County progress on waste management program implementation. Recycling and Solid Waste continues to make progress in meeting the County's Zero Waste goals, but significant challenges remain. New State organic waste diversion

requirements necessitate either the development of a new compost facility or diversion to an offsite organics recycling facility. Additionally, as the Buena Vista Landfill approaches capacity, planning for a new waste transfer station facility is vital to ensure ongoing waste management capacity in the unincorporated south county. While improvements to the County's franchise agreements have helped provide significant new revenue to meet ongoing operational needs, franchise fees do not cover the large capital investment needed for new waste management facilities.

The Board previously directed Community Development and Infrastructure (CDI) to evaluate the potential for meeting these needs through increases to the CSA 9C assessment to cover the additional capital improvement costs for waste facility infrastructure projects. To comply with new State statutes enacted since the creation of CSA 9C, a new parcel charge for "Recycling and Solid Waste Infrastructure, Operation, and Landfill Closure Charge" was approved by the Board after conducting a public hearing on the proposed charge. The parcel charge now appears on property tax bills of parcel owners of developed parcels within the unincorporated Santa Cruz County and will need to be reassessed and reauthorized by the Board at five-year intervals.

### Buena Vista Landfill Facilities Planning

The most recent aerial survey of the Buena Vista Landfill conducted in November 2023 indicated approximately six years of remaining capacity if we assume a peak consumption rate of 529 cubic yards per day. We are planning for the transition from a landfill to a transfer station to continue to provide a permanent local waste and recycling disposal option for Santa Cruz County residents and the County's franchise hauler. Not having a local disposal option would increase vehicle trips between Watsonville and the Monterey Regional Waste Management Landfill (ReGen Monterey), which adds to traffic, increases carbon emissions, and could lead to an increase in illegal dumping. An extensive search in the County for an alternative location (i.e., not on the existing Buena Vista Landfill site) to site a new transfer station or landfill was conducted approximately twenty years ago and was met with widespread community opposition. The current Buena Vista Landfill site continues to be the most feasible location for a transfer station, as there is adequate available space to construct the necessary infrastructure without purchasing land or disrupting neighborhoods.

CDI continues to work with SCS Engineering to design the necessary infrastructure that can be built without significant disturbance to current landfill operations at the Buena Vista Landfill site and serve County waste disposal needs after landfill closure. Several locations on site have been evaluated, and during conceptual design and analysis CDI determined two transfer stations and an organics facility are required to meet future demands and State waste management mandates. "Transfer Station A", located in the northeast corner of the site, would serve self-haulers, while "Transfer Station B" located at the current site of the maintenance building would serve the franchise haulers and large commercial trucks. Separating the traffic flow for these groups is required by CalRecycle, providing increased safety and operational capacity. The top deck of the old landfill and an area on the active landfill have been identified as location options for the proposed organics facility. These locations continue to provide the best alternative given environmental and operational constraints and allow for the maximum use of remaining landfill capacity.

Facility planning at the Buena Vista Landfill site continues to address an organics

processing area that will improve environmental management of organic materials. Currently the focus of organics facility planning is included in the overall Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Buena Vista Redevelopment Project. A Notice of Preparation of the EIR was released on February 15, 2024 and a scoping meeting was held later that month to gather input on the analysis, which is currently in-process. The implementation of the State's greenhouse gas legislation, SB1383, took effect on January 1, 2022, which requires, among other things, the diversion of all food from the waste stream. Since 2004, the County has collected commercial food waste from mandated food businesses in a source-separated container that is hauled to the ReGen Monterey in Marina for processing into compost.

Beginning on January 1, 2022, the County expanded collection of food waste to residential customers and other non-food businesses. The program collects food waste commingled with yard waste and utilizes the existing green colored organics cart for collection. The County's organics are currently being processed into woodchips and compost at nearby facilities in Monterey County, which includes the Moon Glow Dairy in Moss Landing and ReGen Monterey.

The County's organic processing contractor, Keith Day Company, will continue to haul organic waste from the County's disposal sites to either Moon Glow Dairy or ReGen Monterey until the County is able to construct and permit an organics processing and composting facility at the Buena Vista Landfill, or an alternative facility that meets this need, such as an anaerobic digester, gasification, or biochar facility. Staff have also been evaluating the option of not composting organics on-site, and instead, building a facility to accept, process and transfer the material to an offsite compost facility in Monterey County. This would preserve the space that would be occupied by the proposed compost facility for disaster material staging, and potentially a space for alternative infrastructure, such as a waste to energy facility.

#### Ben Lomond Transfer Station Facilities Planning

The Ben Lomond Transfer Station is located on County property adjacent to the closed Ben Lomond Landfill and has been in operation for over thirty years. The closed landfill continues to be monitored for environmental compliance with State and Federal law by CalRecycle and the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. Regulations continue to expand adding new compliance monitoring requirements that are a challenge to comply with given the existing outdoor facilities.

To improve regulatory compliance, the Ben Lomond facility requires upgrades to address storm water runoff regulations and to modernize the facility to meet current County waste management operational needs. What began as a modest upgrade to install a roof canopy over the recycling and household hazardous waste facility areas has expanded in scope to address operational issues such as electrical upgrades and potential modernization of the scale house structure. Current cost estimates for the project are approximately \$8 million. Bond funding for the project is being planned in coordination with the County Debt Finance Committee, and we anticipate funding will be secured and construction of the improvements will begin in Summer 2025. Efforts at Ben Lomond also include the resolution of some privately owned paper lots within the boundary of the closed landfill that GSD Real Property agents have identified for condemnation at a cost to the County of \$28,900.

#### Assessments and Charges - CSA 9C and Infrastructure and Closure Charge

Recycling and Solid Waste explored options to increase the CSA 9C property assessment to stabilize revenue sources that fund new waste management facilities and ongoing maintenance of the Buena Vista Landfill and Ben Lomond Transfer Station. Staff conducted research with the help of consultants and ultimately landed on proposing a new solid waste infrastructure charge. The new annual Recycling and Solid Waste Infrastructure and Closure Charge (Charge) was approved by the Board and first appeared on the 2022 property tax bills for developed parcels in the unincorporated County of Santa Cruz.

Approaching our revenue shortfalls in this manner is the fairest option, as it spreads the costs evenly across all members of the unincorporated County who benefit from having a local landfill and transfer station disposal sites. Persons and businesses located outside of the unincorporated areas and thus do not pay the Charge, instead pay a 28% surcharge when utilizing County disposal site facilities to contribute their fair share for the benefits they receive when using County facilities that they do not otherwise pay to support. The Charge will be utilized to pay for design, permitting, and construction costs, which will be paid over time with the help of a bond or loan. The Charge will also be used to pay for the projected additional monitoring and closure costs for the Buena Vista Landfill resulting from the updated cost estimate developed by the State.

#### Illegal Dumping, Litter Abatement, and Trash Talkers

CDI Recycling and Solid Waste Services continues to work with our non-profit partners, County Parks, and the County Sheriff to collaborate effectively on illegal dumping issues using a multi-agency approach. CDI has also deployed illegal dumping cameras throughout the County in known illegal dumping hotspots. At the writing of this report, no illegal dumping activity has yet been captured on camera. County Parks has increased patrols, and CDI has provided additional resources to increase the Parks Department's waste capacity along the North Coast; the resulting increased waste capacity at County beach parks has reduced the number of overflowing collection containers, thus reducing litter at these sites.

Due to some changes in how the Human Service Department (HSD) can fund the County's CalFresh Employment and Training (CFET) program, CDI is taking over management of the litter abatement contracts with both Downtown Streets Team, Inc. (DST) and with Community Action Board's Watsonville Works program at an annual cost to CDI-Recycling and Solid Waste Services of \$132,000 and to HSD of \$63,400. Currently, DST operates five days per week along the North Coast and in the downtown Felton area at known frequent illegal dumping and litter areas hot spots. In Fiscal Year 2022-23, DST collected 32.86 tons of trash, 9.2 tons of recycling, and 46 sharps. DST also patrols the areas surrounding the Emeline County offices, which has areas that are both in the City of Santa Cruz and the Unincorporated Santa Cruz County. CDI has been in discussions with DST to add a roving hot spot crew that will be able to go to any part of the County as needed. We are happy to report that a second roving crew has been added to the scope of work and commenced cleanup work in November 2024.

CDI Recycling and Solid Waste Services, in partnership with HSD, the City of Watsonville, and Watsonville Works, continue our litter abatement efforts in areas in the City of Watsonville and unincorporated Watsonville areas. We will continue working to grow these efforts in known hot spot areas in and around Watsonville and the southern areas of the unincorporated County as funding becomes available.

In addition to cleanup efforts, we continue our education and outreach campaign through the CDI website, social media, and quarterly newsletters that go out to GreenWaste waste collection customers, and which are available on the CDI website. During this past reporting period, County outreach staff met regularly with community partners to better coordinate our combined efforts to continue to educate the public on the waste, recycling, and composting services that we provide, many at no additional cost to the public (e.g., free mattress disposal, free residential household hazardous waste (HHW) disposal, and e-waste disposal).

During this reporting period there have also been volunteer cleanup events run by our community partners. Save Our Shores has collected 4,185 pounds of trash, and 247 pounds of recycling from County beaches and waterways at forty-three separate events countywide. CDI continues to partner with the Pitch-In Santa Cruz Campaign, whose mission is to “make Santa Cruz the cleanest county in California.” With their help, we have been able to procure many signs and stickers with the Pitch-In Santa Cruz logo that also has a QR code that takes people to the Pitch-In Santa Cruz website. The site is hosted by the County of Santa Cruz and has useful information on how to report illegal dumping in each of the jurisdictions within Santa Cruz County, as well as information on how to get involved in local cleanup efforts. The campaign continues to gain momentum throughout Santa Cruz County and has been instrumental in coordinating many litter clean-up days throughout the County, including an annual clean-up event that will take place in May of every year and bookends the annual coastal clean-up event which takes place in September. The first annual cleanup event in May 2024 removed 150,048 pounds of litter from Santa Cruz County open spaces.

### Disaster Debris Management

CDI Recycling and Solid Waste Services is working to improve disaster debris management in the unincorporated County when disaster strikes. Climate change has increased the frequency and intensity of natural disasters in Santa Cruz County. During the storms of 2023, many areas of the County were flooded, leaving debris in public streets and on private property. The County responded with a clean-up effort by dispatching debris boxes to the hardest hit and most vulnerable locations throughout the County. Our experience with the disaster debris boxes placed during the January storms taught valuable management lessons for future events. These boxes were left unattended overnight, were over-filled, and much of the excess debris was not storm-related but household and construction debris delivered overnight when the boxes were unattended. This created additional work and expense for the County and its drop box haulers.

During the March storms, disaster debris drop boxes were managed more efficiently to help those most impacted. Using the knowledge gained from the January storms, the County again dispatched debris boxes to the hardest hit and most vulnerable communities. However, this time debris boxes were placed only during daylight hours, were monitored at all times, only disaster debris was accepted (items damaged in the floods), and the boxes were changed out regularly. Using this new disaster debris management approach, the March clean-up effort was more manageable, more effective at aiding community members, better at sorting and diverting recyclable and organic debris, and less costly to the County.

The County has reached out to other counties for advice and assistance to improve our disaster debris management, with a focus on best management practices to receive State & Federal reimbursement for County costs. We have learned from Santa Barbara County, that to get to the next level of disaster debris management will require collaboration between County departments working together with State and Federal agencies to recoup our clean-up costs. Santa Barbara shared their experiences from recent storms and from the debris flows that leveled parts of Montecito after the Thomas fire. Santa Barbara County works closely with consulting firm Tetra Tech, Inc., California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to manage debris and seek reimbursement for its costs.

Santa Cruz County debris management efforts will require improved waste management tracking from the time waste is collected through the time when waste is disposed. This “cradle to grave” waste management system is necessary to achieve reimbursement under State and Federal requirements and will require significant changes to the way we currently manage disaster debris collection and disposal.

### Climate Change and Organic Waste Management (Senate Bill 1383)

California's Climate Change Laws have made the most significant change to waste management in the past 30 years and will affect the collection and processing of waste throughout the state for years to come. The waste management mandates incorporated into these climate laws cover nine new waste management program areas that require expanded programming, compliance, and enforcement. These nine program areas are: 1) organic waste and edible food capacity planning, 2) organic waste collection, 3) organic waste product procurement, 4) waste contamination monitoring, 5) organic waste and edible food recovery education and outreach, 6) compliance monitoring and enforcement, 7) CALGreen Building Standards and Model Water Efficiency Landscape Ordinance program monitoring and enforcement, 8) waste hauler oversight, and 9) edible food recovery capacity support.

CDI Recycling and Solid Waste Services is doing a good job implementing many of these State mandated waste management programs, including those where we have longstanding relationships. We are seeing successes in programs that address waste contamination monitoring, organic waste and edible food recovery education and outreach, waste hauler oversight, and edible food recovery capacity planning. However, CDI Recycling and Solid Waste Services is struggling to improve organics program participation, especially diverting food waste in public spaces (e.g., work, school, recreational facilities, etc.). Even within the County employee workforce, there are noted challenges to gaining widespread participation in the separation measures necessary to comply with food waste sorting requirements outlined in State climate laws. County residents have shown a 70% compliance rate when sorting food waste at home, but only a 20% compliance rate when sorting food waste at County facilities. The County is developing outreach and training materials to help address this deficit and gain greater participation in proper waste sorting behavior by County employees. Waste management staff will chart the results of these efforts to determine whether similar efforts can produce behavior change in the public at large.

Amid these challenges with food waste diversion, CDI Recycling and Solid Waste Services has made significant progress on organic waste composting and edible food recovery programs. CDI Recycling and Solid Waste Services has invested time and money into developing countywide partnerships to ensure adequate capacity to

compost organic waste. We have developed good working relationships with local jurisdictions through staff working groups to address capacity planning. We have leveraged these relationships to support edible food recovery through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process that collaboratively hired and funded expanded food recovery support to the volunteer organizations that collect and distribute excess edible food. The five jurisdictions within the county used CalRecycle grant funds to hire Second Harvest Food Bank to use its partnership network to improve edible food recovery. The partnership both feeds more people in need and lightens the burden of added State mandated reporting requirements that land heavily on volunteer food recovery organizations.

### Edible Food Recovery Countywide Collaboration

CDI Recycling and Solid Waste Services staff are working collaboratively with Second Harvest Food Bank (Second Harvest) and staff from the cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, and Watsonville to fully implement State edible food recovery requirements for a variety of mandatory food donors and food recovery organizations. The local jurisdictions each contribute grant funds received from CalRecycle to create an edible food recovery services agreement that was awarded to Second Harvest after competing in an RFP process led by the County.

Under the agreement, Second Harvest is using its extensive edible food partnership network to assist local jurisdictions to coordinate and support food recovery organizations in the collection and redistribution of edible food to people in need. The agreement extends for two years, and Second Harvest will provide bilingual trainings, food safety instruction, and contract and outreach support to edible food generators. Second Harvest also provides record keeping and reporting support to the jurisdictions and edible food contract support to mandatory food donors. This important collaboration provides financial support to crucial food security non-profit and program consistency across all local jurisdictions countywide. This program consistency benefits all the program participants and predictability for food businesses affected by the State mandated program.

### Green Schools and Green Business Programs

CDI Recycling and Solid Waste Services staff are actively engaging with community partners to inform and educate the public on changes in State law that affect recycling and solid waste mandates, especially climate action legislation. During the 2023-24 fiscal year, 893 students were engaged in the Green Schools Program during the 154 lessons that were taught by our Green Schools partners at fifteen different schools, supporting 28 teachers. Two of these schools became certified green schools under the Green Business Program. The Green Business partners currently support 71 certified green businesses in the County. To become a certified green business, there are a number of actions that need to be fulfilled depending on the type of business. These actions could include things like replacing older light bulbs with energy-efficient LED bulbs, switching to non-toxic cleaning products, or purchasing recycled-content paper products.

### Zero Waste Update

CDI Recycling and Solid Waste Services outreach staff is vital to engage the community to meet State mandates when implementing State waste reduction, organics diversion,

and recycling laws. Our outreach staff visit all County businesses annually to educate and prepare them for what statewide organics diversion changes will mean for their business practices and help them comply with state mandated waste management and food recovery requirements. Our outreach staff has also been actively engaging with customers at both our Buena Vista Landfill and Ben Lomond Transfer Stations to provide education on how to properly sort waste to help the County achieve State mandated waste diversion goals. Staff have been visiting multi-family residential complexes and commercial businesses to assist with their organics sorting and collection efforts to help bring the County closer to its zero waste goals.

CDI Recycling and Solid Waste staff have been engaging with other County departments affected by the enactment of Senate Bill (SB) 1383 organics diversion, food recovery, and organics procurement requirements. Many departments are affected due to organics compliance enforcement as well as procurement policies mandated by the sweeping requirements of SB 1383. SB 1383, at its core, is climate change legislation that aims to reduce levels of methane in the environment. New evidence points to landfills emissions of methane, which forms as organic waste decomposes in the anaerobic landfill environment, as the number one source of methane pollution in California. The most productive way to reduce methane in the atmosphere is to eliminate organic matter from landfills and divert it to either an anaerobic digestion facility or compost facility, which can convert the organic waste into soil amendments for use throughout the County's and Salinas Valley's agricultural economy.

One complex mandate is to reduce food waste by increasing edible food rescue operations to divert edible food from the waste stream and supply this edible food to the one-in-four Californians that experience food insecurity. In this past reporting period, CDI has worked closely with Second Harvest Food Bank and the other jurisdictions on edible food recovery. Second Harvest Food Bank is a key partner in coordinating the food recovery process and data collection to fulfill State reporting requirements.

The County hired SCS Engineers to conduct a 2018 waste characterization study for all County waste. The results of that study identified organic waste as the largest of the waste stream for all sectors (commercial, residential, and multi-family) deposited for disposal at the landfill. Compostable organic material made up 36.7 percent of commercial waste, 46.2 percent of single-family residential waste, and 47.1 percent of all multi-family residential waste.

CDI-Recycling and Solid Waste continues to work with our statewide partners towards enacting Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation to require manufacturers of hazardous and difficult to handle materials to bear the costs of their end-of-life disposal. These EPR legislative efforts are similar to those already in place for sharps and pharmaceutical takeback programs.

On June 30, 2022, Governor Newsom signed SB 54, a landmark new plastics packaging EPR law that by 2032 requires 100% of packaging sold in the State to be recyclable or compostable; 25% of plastic packaging be cut by volume; and 65% of all single-use plastic packaging be recycled. The legislation intends to shift the burden of plastic pollution management from local jurisdictions to the plastics industry by raising \$5 billion from industry members over 10 years.

CDI-Recycling and Solid Waste recently completed the "refuel your fun campaign,"



where we partnered with the California Product Stewardship Council (CPSC) to conduct outreach, education, and distribution events to promote using reusable, instead of single-use, propane canisters. The campaign was a huge success, and in September 2024, Governor Newsom signed SB1280, which will now require all one-pound propane cylinders sold in California to be reusable or refillable starting January 1, 2028.

The Non-Exclusive Roll-Off (NERO) franchise agreements which expired at the end of 2022 have been restructured to ensure diversion of recyclable material in accordance with AB 341 (mandatory commercial recycling), SB 1383 (mandatory organics diversion) and County's disposal site recycling policies. The new agreements may include removal of permanent roll-off boxes from customers with ongoing weekly pick-up service from the NERO and place the permanent boxes in the exclusive agreement with GreenWaste Recovery, which has capability to provide recyclables and organics diversion services using a variety of smaller bin/cart sizes and service frequencies. This will allow permanent service customers to properly separate their recyclables, organics, and trash using the 3-container system instead of discarding all materials into one roll-off box. The NERO haulers would only be allowed to service temporary customers such as construction sites and cleanup projects or customers for whom they can provide full organics, recycling and trash services.

### **Financial Impact**

Administration of the Recycling and Solid Waste Services long-term planning implementation is included in the FY 2024-25 Recycling and Solid Waste Services Budget (625110/62330).

### **Strategic Initiatives**

Operational Plan - Sustainable Environment: Natural Resources, Local Conservation,  
Operational Excellence: County Infrastructure  
Climate Action - Waste

The Recycling and Solid Waste strategic plan supports the goals to protect natural resources and strengthen diversion efforts. Additionally, the plan supports the maintenance and improvements of the County solid waste facilities.

### **Submitted By:**

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### **Recommended By:**

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

### **Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.